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PERCEPTIONS OF A HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT WORK PRACTICUM IN A TECHNICAL INSTITUTE

BY

FREDERICK RAYMOND HEATH

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Perceptions of a Human Resource Management Work Practicum in a Technical Institute** submitted by **Frederick Raymond Heath** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Education.**

Dr. J. Small

Dr. D. Richards

Dr. T. Holdaway

Dr. F. Peters

Dr. Y. Reshef

Dr. T. Hogan

October 4, 1994

Abstract

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the perceived impact that a pilot six-week, non-paid work practicum had on the second year Management Program at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology.

Perceptions of impact were gathered from the three major stakeholders--the students, the field agency representatives, and the instructors. Data were gathered between February and April 1994 using both focus group and personal in-depth interviews. The conceptual model for the study was adopted from that of Leavitt and Bahrami (1988), which depicted the interactive nature of an organization's structure, task, people, control, and environment. According to these authors, a change in any one of these five elements affects the other four. The addition of the work practicum in the Management Program's curriculum was seen as a change in its structure.

In general, the findings of the study indicated that by introducing the practicum into the program's curriculum a positive change was produced in the external environment, together with an improved image of the students and a clearer understanding of the program's goals.

The primary task of the program, preparing people for employment, was supported by utilizing the practicum. All three stakeholders perceived that the employability of the practicum students was enhanced.

The practicum necessitated adjustments in the behaviour of both instructors and students. The instructors had to modify their teaching behaviour and the students were required to demonstrate non-academic skills.

The introduction of the field agency representatives into the learning process resulted in both the instructors and students relinquishing some of their control.

Finally, from these conclusions, recommendations for the future use of this type of experiential learning component are offered. Specifically the practicum should be continued in the Management Program at NAIT but care should be taken before this type of activity is introduced into those institutions which have limited numbers of business students.

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This study was completed with the support and assistance from many people. It is with sincere appreciation that I acknowledge their contribution.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) is a public postsecondary non-university institution located in Edmonton, Alberta. It was officially opened in November 1962 as a publicly administered institution. On April 1, 1982, NAIT was placed under the authority of a board of governors, in accordance with the Technical Institutes Act. Greater Edmonton is Alberta's largest urban area (pop. 785,465), and is home to the provincial government and many industries, businesses, and other agencies which provide business, health, legal, education, social, and other services to the people of Edmonton and Northern Alberta (Canadian Census, 1986, pp. 92-117). The dual objectives of NAIT's programs are (a) to help students fulfil their personal, social, and vocational aspirations and (b) to meet the skilled workforce requirements of business and industry. NAIT's instructional activity centers upon six instructional divisions: the Business Division, the Health Sciences Division, the Engineering Technologies Division, the Industrial Division, Continuing Education, and International Education. The first four divisions carry the responsibility for delivering all full-time and apprentice programs, while Continuing Education facilitates the development and conduct of short, part-time, and ad hoc programming. International Education provides educational and applied technology services for industry, educators, and students of developing countries throughout the world.

During the 1992/93 academic year, full-time enrollment in the two-year diploma and one-year certificate programs totalled 6,715 students. Of these, 2,331 students were enrolled in business programs. Registrations in Continuing Education exceeded 31,000, while 7,328 students participated in NAIT's apprenticeship programs. Staffing included 775 academic, 631 support, and 53 managerial positions. NAIT's total 1992/93 budget was $100.3 million, including an operating budget of $96.1 million, and a capital budget of $4.1 million (Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, 1992).

Business Administration is a subset of the Business Division and has four programs: Accounting, Finance, Management, and Marketing. The four programs share a common first year. Upon completion of the first year, students choose the program they wish to specialize in during their second year. According to the NAIT *Calendar* (1994/95), the objective of these programs is to prepare students for careers in various aspects of business. More specifically, the programs are structured to provide students with knowledge in the basic principles of business, a knowledge of both the quantitative and human relations skills required in business management, specialized knowledge associated with various occupations, and the opportunity to apply these skills in a variety of assignments, projects and activities.

During the 1993/94 academic year, 95 students were enrolled in the Management Program, and of these 45 were specializing in the Human Resource Management Stream.

The author of this report has been employed in NAIT's Business Division since 1969. He is currently the Program Head of the Management Program and was on leave during the 1993/94 academic year.

Focus of the Study

Co-operative education in the generic sense is a system which integrates classroom study with related on-the-job work experience. This is usually achieved by alternating periods of paid employment with in-class study. The Canadian Association for Co-operative Education (1988) has narrowed this general definition to include the following six criteria:

1. Each work situation must be a suitable learning situation in the student's general area of interest.

2. The student must be engaged in productive work rather than merely observing.

3. The student receives remunerations for the work performed.

4. The student is monitored by the educational institution.

5. The student is supervised and evaluated by the co-operative employer.

6. The normal total co-operative work experience is normally 50% of the time spent in academic study and in no circumstances less than 30%.

According to Kerka (1989) there are accrued benefits to the student, the institution, and employer if this type of activity is pursued. Students can experience improved self-confidence, self-reliance and responsibility; increased

experience improved self-confidence, self-reliance and responsibility; increased relevance of learning and motivation for study; improved contacts with potential employers; and possible higher starting salaries. The academic institution can accomplish closer relationships with the business community and enhanced student retention and graduate placement, and it is given the opportunity to improve and field-test its curriculum. Employers can pre-screen potential employees, lower their recruitment costs, and improve their public relations image.

The above-mentioned benefits are obviously worth pursuing. However, the current economic reality limits the extent to which all six of the above-mentioned criteria can be incorporated into a work experience program. The two criteria, involving the percentage of time that is traditionally spent in the co-op component and remunerations to students, present significant problems in the implementation of the co-op program. Decreased funding from all levels of government dictates to a large extent how many external and extra activities an educational institution can partake in. No longer is there funding for extended curriculum whereby the traditional two-year program can be extended to two and a half years to facilitate a co-operative work experience program. Faculty would not be available during the summer months to monitor and supervise students during their work experience and it is doubtful that the students would want to add another half year to their studies. Also, based upon an informal survey of NAIT's Management and Marketing Program's 14 Advisory Committee Members, current downsizing and budget cuts are not conducive to business enterprises being able to pay students to

do work that ex-employees did before they were laid off. These two factors dictated that a "modified" co-operative work experience program or work practicum had to be developed before such an endeavour could be incorporated into the Management Program.

In 1984, the Business Division at NAIT changed the format of its academic year from three 12-week trimesters to two 16-week semesters. Previous to 1984, students began their academic year immediately after Labour Day (First Monday in September) and continued their first trimester until the end of November. The second trimester started the first week in December and finished the first week in March. The third trimester commenced the second week of March and the academic year concluded the last week of May. At present, students begin their academic year after Labour Day and attend classes with no break until a few days before Christmas. They return to school the first weekday after New Year's Day and finish their academic year the last week of April. This model has proved to be superior in that students no longer have a substantial Christmas and New Year's break in the middle of a trimester, and they have a longer summer vacation in which to find employment.

To facilitate a practicum the following attendance format was developed: Two 13 week semesters with an eight-week period between the two. That is, students involved in a work practicum begin their academic year as before, immediately after Labour Day. However, they finish their first semester at the end of November. They then have eight weeks to complete a six week field-based

educational experience. Their second semester begins the first week of February and is completed at the same time as the rest of the students, the last week of April.

A schematic diagram illustrating the three different academic years utilizing the 1993/94 calendar is shown as Figure 1.

In September 1993, 18 students in the Human Resource Management Stream in the Management Program at NAIT were selected to participate in a six-week, non-paid work practicum pilot study. These students had successfully completed the first year Business Administration Program, and if they were successful in completing the second year Management Program, they would be eligible for graduation.

The main purpose of this study then, was to investigate the perceived impact of this work practicum pilot project on the second year of the Management Program at NAIT.

Perceptions were gathered from the participating students to determine how the work practicum influenced their attitudes and awareness towards their academic studies, their personal management skills, their teamwork skills, and their commitment to a vocation in human resource management. Also, perceptions were gathered from the field agency representatives, and those instructors directly involved in teaching the students, so as to determine their perceptions of the work practicum and the resulting impact on the second year of the Program.

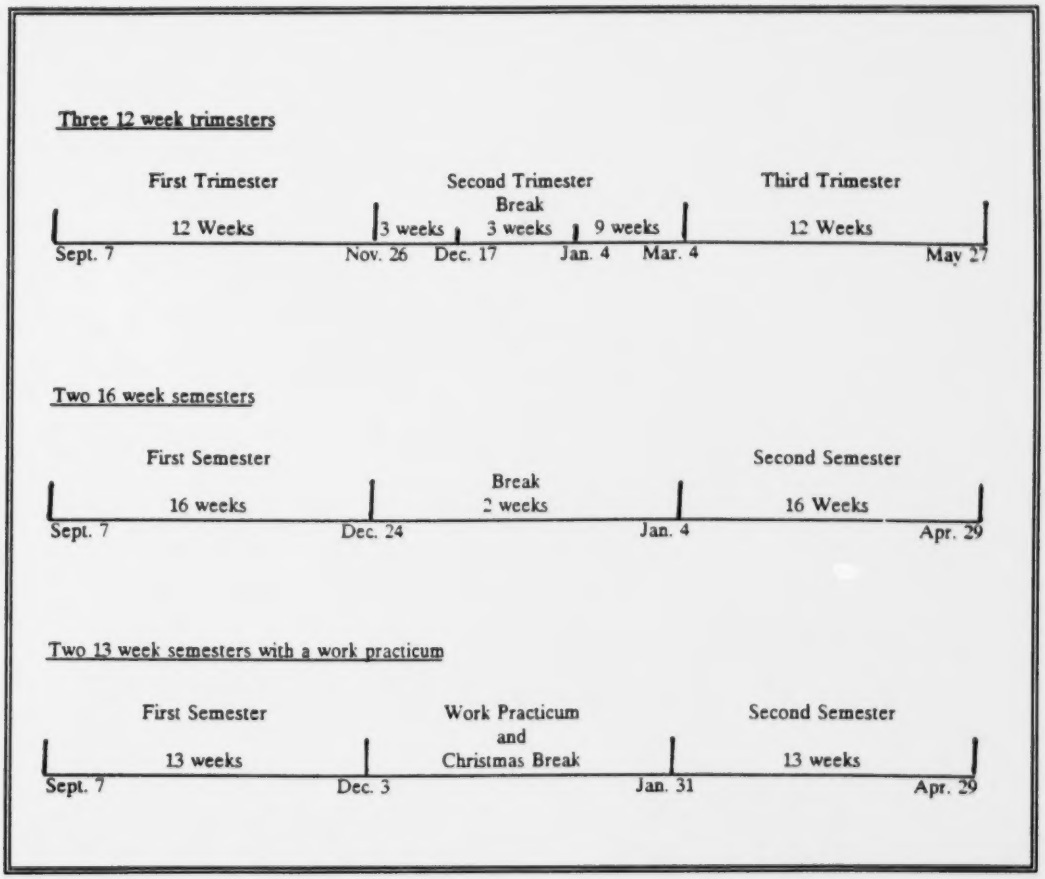


Figure 1. Three Academic Year Formats

General Research Question

The purpose of the study, which was the subject of this report, was to address the following question:

> What are stakeholders' perceptions of the work practicum pilot project held in the second year of NAIT's Management Program?

The study reviewed the recent pilot project and solicited perceptions from the participating students, field agency representatives, and instructors.

Specific Research Questions

A. Participating Students

1. To what extent did the students perceive that their expectations were met by their participation in the work practicum?
2. How did the students perceive the structure, organization, and management of the work practicum?
3. How was the work practicum perceived by students to influence their awareness of and attitudes towards their academic studies, personal management skills, and teamwork skills?
4. How was the work practicum perceived by students to influence their awareness of and attitudes towards human resource management as a vocation?

B. Field Agency Representatives

1. To what extent did the field agency representatives perceive that the participating students demonstrated the employability skills as outlined by

the Conference Board of Canada?

2. What were the perceptions of the field agency representatives with respect to the organization and management of the project and how could it be improved?

3. What were the perceived benefits received and cost incurred by the field agency representatives as a result of their participation in the project?

4. What would be the likelihood that the field agency representatives would be willing to participate in similar work practica in the future?

C. Instructors

1. What were the instructors' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the practicum as it related to the total second year Management Program?

2. What were the instructors' perceptions of the desirability of continuing the human resource management work practicum in the future?

3. What were the instructors' perceptions of the desirability and feasibility of expanding the work practicum to other disciplines in the Management Program?

Definitions

A number of terms used throughout this study are defined below in order to provide a common basis for understanding.

Perception is "a partial, incomplete view of something that is nevertheless

real, and capable of different interpretation when seen from different viewpoints. It is partial and incomplete only because each perception yields experience of only a limited number of parts of the whole" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 83).

Attitudes are "a positive or negative affect toward a particular group, institution, concept, or social object" (Ary, Jacobs, & Razaveih, 1985, p. 194).

Awareness is "being conscious and understanding of a situation. It implies having knowledge of something through alertness in observing, or in interpreting what one sees, hears or feels" (Webster, 1988).

Organization of the Thesis

This chapter has presented an overview of the study, its rationale, and its purpose. Chapter 2 is a review of the general literature and specific research studies germane to co-operative education and work practica. The research design, methodology, and data collection procedures are described in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4 the academic context and antecedent data for the study are outlined including an analysis and interpretation of both the students' pre-work practicum group focus interviews, and the field agency representatives' pre-work practicum questionnaire. Chapter 5 presents the findings that emerged as a result of the student group focus interviews, and the field agency representative and instructor in-depth interviews. In Chapter 6, the relationships between the conceptual model depicted in Chapter 2 and the findings presented in Chapter 5 are explored.

Finally in Chapter 7, recommendations for future work practica within the Business Division at NAIT, and in other postsecondary institutions are suggested along with suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature relevant to this study is focused on six areas which serve as the basis for organizing this chapter. In the first section, the history of co-operative education and work practica are reviewed. In the second section, the benefits of co-operative education and work practica to students, educational institutions and employers are discussed. In the third section, the reasons for non-participation are explored. The fourth section outlines the necessity for work practica to be integrated into the total academic experience. In the fifth section, the critical skills required in the future by the Canadian workforce are outlined. Finally, in the sixth section, a conceptual framework which guided the research, is presented.

History of Co-operative Education and Work Practica

Watts (1991) succinctly captured the concept of work experience programs when he stated

> "Work experience" is a paradoxical phrase, in that it is firmly distinguished from "work", and is used to describe schemes in which only *part* of the full experience of work is available . . . it is applied to schemes in which people "experience" work tasks in work environments, but without taking on the full identity of a worker. The key distinction is that the role of students on a work-experience scheme is that not of *employee* but of *learner.* On the other hand -- a further paradox -- it is arguable that the learning yield will be substantial and distinctive only if the experience gets as close as possible to that of being an employee. (p. 16)

Work practica are not a new phenomenon. Indeed their roots can be traced as far

back as 4000 B.C. when the Egyptians began to emphasize the development of skills for the benefit of their society, and organized apprenticeship programs were in operation (Sievert, 1975).

According to Dollar and Rust (1983), "traditional education was also largely experiential in that it was conducted as a part of the ongoing affairs of life" (p. 10). Previous to the modern industrial state, apprenticeship programs were the major formalized mechanism in educating the young whereby the youth was inducted into both the skills of the craft and the total life-style of the master. Some schools did exist; however, their importance was limited in that they focused almost entirely on theology, medicine, and law. With the advent of the modern age, experiential education gave way to the classroom instructional process. Schools were organized much like the conventional modern factory whereby tasks were differentiated into smaller or simpler parts. For example, programs were divided into grades and subjects, and the media of instruction were the teacher and the book. Education became symbolic in nature in that it was transmitted through the written and verbal media. Schools became closed institutions that were able to monopolize and control education by defining it as a set of activities that only they could provide. Toffler (1970) summed up this situation as follows: "The whole idea of assembling masses of students (raw materials) to be processed by teachers (workers) in a centrally located school (factory) was a stroke of industrial genius" (p. 400). It is interesting to note that modern society has a difficult time recognizing learning unless it is certified by a school.

According to the Canadian Association for Co-operative Education (1988), the earliest form of education resembling current co-operative education programs can be traced back to 1903 when the "sandwich" course was initiated in England at Sunderland Technical College. The belief that a "complete" person should emerge from a post secondary institute and not one that simply had knowledge and understanding prompted the development of programs that included relevant work experience in addition to academic pursuits.

In North America, the first co-op program was started at the University of Cincinnati in 1906. The rationale, according to Schneider (1906, cited in Chaing, 1988) was two fold:

> (1) many elements of most professions cannot be taught effectively in the classroom, but require practical experience for adequate mastery, (2) most students need or want to work during their post-secondary education, but the work performed is usually menial and unrelated to their course of study. (p. 3.1)

Co-operative education did not grow quickly in the United States. However, in the early 1960s, as a result of federal funding, substantial growth did take place. Currently, even though concentrated in a relatively few states, one third of all universities and colleges in the United States have some kind of work practicum within their curriculums.

Tausig (1980, cited in Turner and Frederich, 1987) summarized the origins of co-operative education in Canada as follows:

> Cooperative education began in Canada at the University of Waterloo with the introduction in 1957 of a single engineering program in the faculty of engineering. For the next eight years, this was the only cooperative education program offered in the country.

> Then in 1965, the university instituted additional engineering cooperative programs. These were followed by still other coop programs at other universities - namely, at Sherbrooke in Quebec in 1966, Memorial in Newfoundland in 1969, and Regina in Saskatchewan in 1970. (pp. 54-55)

Currently in Canada there are 85 postsecondary academic institutions offering various forms of co-operative education. In Alberta, Grant MacEwan Community College, Lethbridge Community College, Keyano College, Mount Royal College, the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, and the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology all offer at least one co-op program within their curriculum (Coop Education, 1992).

In summing up the history of co-operative education, and its value to higher education, Ryder (1987) outlined the following:

> First, it has demonstrated that it is an educational method of considerable merit; it is pedagogically sound. Second, it has shown itself to be a cost-saving means to post-secondary education. Third, it has been found to be an effective and cost-efficient human resource strategy for employers. Fourth, it has proved itself adaptable to a variety of institutional settings and to the educational needs of diverse students pursuing diverse fields of study. These are not only accomplishments of cooperative education, they constitute its fundamental strength as an educational method and will carry it, as such, into the future. (p. 305)

Clinton (1983) also envisioned the continual growth of co-operative education: "the gap between academic training and vocational training will continue to narrow as employers and educators realize that all workers need both types of training to become and remain effective employees" (p. 45).

Benefits of Co-operative Education and Work Practica

Benefits of co-op and work practica are claimed for students, employers, and academic institutions.

Students

According to Keeton and Tate (1978), "experiential learning refers to learning in which the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied" (p. 2). In addition, Barbeau (1985) asserted that "the philosophy of co-operative education is simple and direct. There are parts of every occupation that cannot be learned in the academic setting--that can be learned only by practice" (p. 65). Davis (1971, cited in Van der Vorm, 1987) concluded that students can gain significant benefits from co-op assignments in that they can learn "to define and solve problems, to recognize different value systems, to test theory against practice and to appreciate knowledge both for its utility and for its own sake." (p. 228)

Dalin (1983), in commenting on learning by participation, stated that schools fail young people by isolating them from "real" life, and that their curricula fail to meet young people's social and psycho-emotional needs. The result is often dissatisfaction within the schools and unhappiness in young people. He specifically claimed that modern society has not developed a policy so that young people can cope with both their own needs and those of society. However, by combining school work and responsible roles in society, a contribution to the solution of this problem can be achieved. By utilizing a work experience component in the curriculum, the student is no longer totally exposed to a passive learning situation

where adults have programmed their day and where the content and method of instruction is determined by someone else. As a result, the work experience changes not only the students' roles but also the relationship between them and the educators. Similarly, Van der Vorm (1987) maintained that "a co-op work assignment is more than arriving at work on time and performing well on the job" (p. 228). She asserted that although the most obvious learning involves technical skills, the broader learning implications for a work experience program includes students' personal and social development.

The purposes of co-operative education, as outlined by Everard (1987), include easing the transition between education and work; enhancing the relevance of academic studies as they relate to their practical applications in the workplace; increasing the mutual understanding between students, teachers and employers; exploiting the potential of the work setting as a vehicle for learning; obtaining a useful and valuable output of work as a by-product of learning; and enabling educational institutions to better cope with the high rate of technical change in the workplace. In addition, Brown (1984), in her review of the literature, suggested that co-operative education gives students realistic information about careers and organizations, improves job-related skills, and gives stronger certainty about career choices. In addition, she found that co-op graduates have more realistic expectations of the first job, they choose jobs relevant to their career plans, and they have a greater sense of power on the job.

Similarly Gore (1973, cited in Ellis, 1987) stated that

> Students seem to benefit from cooperative education in numerous ways. Most important, they understand more about the expectations and requirements of their professional field. As well, they become more clear about their careers by learning about the various possibilities available to them. The work experience they acquire through co-op is also of value in obtaining their first jobs. Learning concepts in the class that are then applied in the workplace helps students to understand their discipline.
> (p. 15)

Lee (1976) also stressed the importance of providing work experiences to students while they were in school when he stated that

> The work experience students receive through cooperative vocational education develops specific job skills, enhances interpersonal relationship development, speeds up maturation, and provides the opportunity to refine life and career goals. They also develop the competencies needed for work entry in their occupational choice. (p. 198)

Wilson (1987) when summarizing his research findings as to the benefits of co-operative education stated that

> The body of research studies examining the impact of cooperative education on students clearly indicates that participation contributes to clarification of career goals and greater assurance in deciding upon a goal; developing autonomy and self-confidence; increasing awareness of the needs for skills involved in interpersonal relations; and increasing motivation for studies, as manifested in increased academic achievement and perseverance. (p. 279)

In addressing why these phenomena occur in co-operative learning, Wilson suggested that learner involvement in the tasks of learning contributes strongly to the effectiveness of learning; it gives the student an opportunity to test the appropriateness of career choices; it clarifies their learning goals in that they are directly exposed to the practitioner in the field; it is perceived by students to be an

integral part of their total college education; and feedback is formative in that evaluation of performance is done both formally and informally during the practicum, and thus the opportunity to correct errors is immediate.

Wilson's findings were echoed by Ashwork and Saxton (1992):

> The strength of the placement for the students is in large part, that it provides a near-approximation to the real-life exercise of his or her academic discipline. The value which a placement experience adds to a course is especially that it enlivens the "theory" by allowing it to be used to interpret lived experience. And it also has a value in raising lived-through experiences to a level where they can be properly and effectively reflected on. In other words, a placement has the potential to link theory and experience--and without this link, theory is not truly theoretical because it is not theorizing about anything significant to the person, and experience is not fully consciously experienced because it is not rationally reflected on. (p. 113)

Employers

Brown (1987), when explaining why employers participate in co-operative education, stated that "it has the potential for addressing both their immediate and long term employment needs" (p. 286). Not only does it facilitate recruitment and training but it also promotes professional release time for current employees to pursue other job functions. In addition, the ability to free professional staff from less demanding duties was cited by Phillips (1978). He concluded that permanent staff are freed and can focus their skills and efforts on duties that are of greater value to the organization. Maxwell and Currie (1984) concurred when they came to the conclusion that "co-operative education is seen as part of a corporate responsibility to support regional students, the program provides an opportunity to assign employees to special projects, and the program provides a return on

investment by exposing students to the reality of the business world" (p. 58).

Hamilton (1983, cited in Clinton, 1983) claimed that businesses looking for reasons to support and collaborate with public education should consider their work with schools as one means of discharging a community, public responsibility. In addition, local taxes tend to be a significant cost of doing business, and as a result business people should be interested in getting the best possible return on their education tax dollars. Also, work practica contribute to a reliable source and continuing supply of well-educated potential employees.

Drawbaugh (1977) provided further insight into what motivates employers to participate in work experience programs when he stated that

> Cooperative education has created a strong relationship between industry and the public education . . . . There are two reasons for employers being involved in cooperative education. One, is that the cooperative education students are eager to learn and they have work that needs to be done. The second is that cooperative education has, for a long time, been recognized by employers as a useful device for recruiting prominent personnel. Educationally, a cooperative program is a relevant approach to teaching and learning, which also widens the bridge between school and work. (p. 28)

Heermann (1975) when outlining the benefits of co-operative education to the community stated that this type of experience helps provide a pool of college-educated workers. That is, students who have participated in co-operative education have demonstrated their understanding of the social and economic structure of the community and thus, are more readily adaptable to local needs. In addition, the co-op experience increases the students' sense of citizenship and responsibility, and as a result these students aspire to positions of community

responsibility in order to contribute to the effectiveness of decision making in technical, social, political, or social realms. Also, co-operative programs increase the likelihood that students will remain in the community, in that they are provided with the opportunity to sample from a spectrum of careers.

Academic Institutions

Loken and Cutt (1986) outlined some of the benefits of co-operative education programs for colleges and universities. They concluded that these types of programs contribute to the quality and number of students attracted to the institution and this in turn contributes to stronger academic performances. Also, they thought that co-operative programs promoted improvements in faculty, in that students are more knowledgeable about the world of work and as a result faculty can create more intellectually demanding courses. Further, because experimental learning enables faculty to gain additional information about the requirements of industry, it helps them make courses more practical and responsive to the needs of employers.

Heerman (1975) also believed that there were several advantages accrued to those postsecondary institutions that participated in co-operative work programs and work practica. Included in these benefits are improved student retention; a greater responsiveness of program and curricular offerings to the needs of the community; increased clarification of the institute's philosophy, programs and services; increased community familiarization with the capabilities of students

when performing work tasks, applying knowledge, and accepting authority; an improved counselling function, in that the college can better guide students in career objectives; promotion of an on-going self-renewal for faculty, by helping them keep abreast of the latest developments and innovations in the community; utilization of outside facilities that are not easily duplicated on campus; and finally, allowing for immediate feedback regarding program success.

Evans (1971) affirmed that co-operative education programs are a significant benefit to educational institutions in that they allow educators to keep abreast of the changing student and labour market needs. He maintained that

> one of the advantages of cooperative education . . . is its quick adaptability to change in the labor market demands. By contrast, vocational education which is based on school-operated laboratories can be quite out of tune with labor market demands, partly because most vocational teachers are prepared to offer instruction in only one relatively small family of occupations. If the teacher has tenure then the school has little flexibility in dropping an outdated program. Since cooperative work education uses instructors on the job, and since openings for training stations are closely related to opportunities for full-time employment of graduates, the CWE (Cooperative Work Education) is quickly responsive to the changes of the labor market. (pp. 196-197)

Resistance to Co-op Programs and Work Practica

Stone and Wonser (1990) claimed that there is an assumption that work experience is a powerful motivator, but few studies have explored the contribution of experientially based work programs on social development or psychological maturity of the participants. They went on to say that the methodology used to

study experiential learning is often self-reports of the participants, and that there is a need to examine more closely what faculty and field supervisors do to ensure that students learn, and that host organizations are appropriately served. Kitson (1993) maintained that co-operative education does not deliver all that it claims. He concluded from his research that students who participate in co-op programs gain no competitive advantage over other students, even though co-op students spend up to an additional year in completing their academic program. He went on to state that the personal qualities employers look for in new graduates can be developed in different ways.

Although there is much literature on the benefits gained by participating in co-operative programs and work practica, there are relatively few students and educational institutions involved with this activity. According to Wilson (1987) there are approximately 200,000 postsecondary students, at more than 1,000 colleges and universities, participating in co-op activities in the United States. However, nearly half of these programs are concentrated in 11 states. Heinemann et al. (1988, cited in Kerka, 1989) noted that "forty percent of student enrollments are at 6 percent of colleges with co-op programs--less than 2 percent of all full-time students and less than 2 percent of all colleges and universities" (p. 3). Grossman et al. (1988) in an American national study of 423 postsecondary occupational programs reported similar levels of participation. They concluded that "the impact of the program in the post-secondary environment is quite limited" (p. 25).

In addressing the question as to why co-operative education does not flourish at more postsecondary schools, Wooldridge (1987) claimed that there were several detriments. First, it is thought of as an unconventional system of learning. It implies that learning can take place outside the teacher's reach, outside the classroom, and outside the traditional course structure. As a result, faculty usually resist its implementation, and if co-operative education is to be successful, faculty commitment is crucial. Second, it is viewed as anti-intellectual. That is, it is seen as corrupting education with the realities of life, and thus, it breaks up the community of scholars that traditionalists strive to protect. Third, it is believed that the costs of co-operative education is too high. Not only is there a need to supplement faculty with co-ordinators to oversee students on co-op and work practicum jobs, but large numbers of students on work assignments can result in a substantial loss of registered full-time equivalents.

Jasso (1983) enumerated the following reasons as to why business finds it hard to work with schools. She claimed that many educators

> (1) have little interest in working with business because it requires a new approach and extra effort; (2) have tunnel vision; (3) have unbusinesslike standards; (4) lack strong leadership skills; (5) require too much red tape; (6) lack concern or understanding of business's needs, worries, or problems; (7) expect one-way giving; (8) worry about their turf; (9) take business for granted; and (10) fear that if business gets involved, it might do a better job, and where would that leave schools? (p. 81)

In addition, Heermann (1975) maintained that "problems frequently identified with co-operative education tend to fall into one of four broad categories" (p. 44). First, it is impossible to maintain a consistent quantity and

quality of placements throughout the fluctuations of the business cycle. Employment restrictions imposed by contracts or union regulations makes it very difficult to find meaningful experiences for students. Also, the ethical question of placing students in work positions during periods of high unemployment and thus jeopardizing the employment opportunities of those people who are disadvantaged and desperately need work must be addressed. In summary, the economic environment is a critical factor in securing job placements.

Second, the needs of the students has to be balanced with those of the employers. Students need a challenging experience that is appropriate to their studies, offers a variety of different tasks, and can be timetabled into their academic year. These requirements are not always convenient to the employer, whose needs at any given time may not be in harmony with those of the students. As a result, students may perceive that they have been given repetitive and menial jobs. This is further exacerbated if they feel that they are giving up a part of their discretionary time so as to complete a worthless practicum.

Third, the learning that takes place in the practicum may be contrary to accepted academic knowledge. Employers may influence students to place emphasis on *what is the current practice* as opposed to the academic instructors who are trying to teach *what should be the current practice.* In other words the practicum, which is intended to integrate study and work components, could result in the student developing a dual mind set which do not interrelate.

Finally, in some cases, the absence of trust and understanding between

education and industry has produced a climate incompatible with co-operative education. Wooldridge (1964, cited in Heermann, 1975) noted that "businessmen felt that educators were cloistered in their ivory towers and educators saw businessmen as entirely profit motivated" (p. 49). Being able to change both perceptions has proved very difficult over the years.

Integration

Miller (1991) defined integration as "the bringing together of parts to make a coherent whole which functions as one" (p. 151). In applying this definition to work practicums Miller claimed that

> the concept of *experiential integration* can be used to describe the ways in which students are helped to make sense of their placement experience. This occurs when students are able to see the relationships between different aspects of their experience, and thus to gain new insights and understanding. (pp. 151-152)

According to Smithers (1976), "the major reason for including industrial training in undergraduate courses instead of relying on pre- or post-graduate, or vocation experience is that the academic and industrial parts are integrated" (p. 33). When co-operative education in the United States was getting its start, Schneider (1910, cited in Barbeau, 1985) succinctly captured the essence of integrating work experience into the academic curriculum when he stated that "it should not require much argument to show that the practice and the theory underlying it should be taught simultaneously, if possible" (p. 65). In a similar

vein, Ashworth and Saxton (1992) claimed "the work experience component is intended to be integrated with classroom learning as opposed to being tacked on" (p. 1). This view was shared by the Ontario Ministry of Education (1989) when it stated:

> At these times the classroom becomes a forum for reflecting on personal experiences, for subjecting personal perspectives to public discussion, for personal interaction, for building and testing hypotheses, for disciplined inquiry, and for setting learning objectives. The classroom also provides an opportunity for students to make sense out of their experiences, to put these experiences into broader prospective, to reflect on and analyze their applications, and to internalize their learnings. (p. 11)

Similarly, Dollar and Rust (1983) defined learning by participation as "an integrative process that includes participation in society, critical reflection on that participation, and the relation of experiences to theoretical knowledge" (p. 26). The integrative nature of the three dimensions is illustrated in Figure 2.

Participation implies that students engage in challenging activities that are related to their vocational choice, are considered useful to others, and are intrinsically rewarding. The outcomes, significance, and consequences of their participation is reflected upon critically by the students so that they can examine the meaning of their activities. Finally, students can then relate both their participation in the job placement and their critical reflection on that experience, to the knowledge they have accumulated during their academic studies.

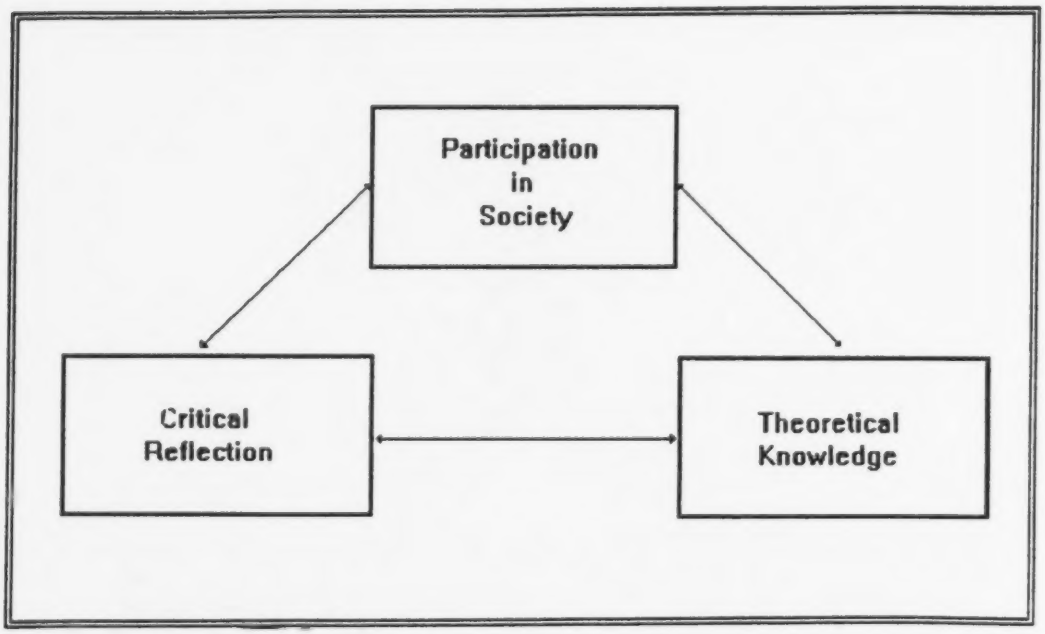


Figure 2. Integrative Process of Experiential Learning

Critical Skills Required of the Workforce

Carnevale (1988), as part of a major research project for the American Society for Training and Development, identified the following seven skills needed for work:

1. Learning to learn. The ability to absorb, process, and apply new information quickly and effectively is critical, in that employers are more frequently shifting employees between jobs and responsibilities.

2. Listening and oral communication.

3. Competence in reading, writing and computation. In addition to basic academic skills, proficiency in summarizing, monitoring one's own work and using analytical and critical thinking skills will become increasingly important.

4. Adaptability, creative thinking, and problem solving. Workers who can think creatively so as to solve problems and overcome barriers will be more sought after.

5. Personal management, self-esteem, goal setting, motivation, and personal career development. Setting goals and meeting them, taking pride in work accomplished, and enhancing job skills to meet new challenges are important characteristics for employees to possess.

6. Group effectiveness, interpersonal skills, negotiation, and teamwork. The ability to work co-operatively in teams is becoming more important for success in the workplace.

7. Organizational effectiveness and leadership. Those employees who can assume responsibility, motivate co-workers, and have some sense as to where the organization is headed, will become more desirable in the future.

Clinton (1983), when commenting on what business wants, asserted that

> Some people in the education community may still hold the view that industry's interest is limited to wanting worker drones with job-specific skills. In some situations that still may be so. But increasingly companies desire more than just skills from public education. They want graduates with positive attitudes toward work, self-motivation, and behaviour patterns suitable for their particular business environments. There is probably no better way to do this than by a time-sharing program that makes industry people available to students in their classrooms and gets students into the workplace for a firsthand view and even part-time employment. (p. 48)

Van den Bosch (1983) claimed that the following five categories of skills were necessary for students if they were to work effectively at solving problems:

> Technical-instrumental skills: Skills to perform a task in a professional manner. Examples: proper use of an instrument, machine or tool; report making; letter writing.
> Communication skills: Skills in working and cooperating with others. Examples: listening, handling social conventions, participating in group discussions, playing and enjoying together.
> Political skills: Skills related to the existing labour and power structure, involving knowledge and understanding of social processes. Examples: political decision making, roles of men and women, roles of trade unions, personal career perspectives.
> Value skills: Skills to clarify and express values in concrete situations as a means of developing personal identity. Examples: awareness in personal relations with others, anticipation of personal conflicts, forming political opinions.
> Change skills: Skills to change both situations and oneself. Examples: negotiating, experimenting, changing of habits, becoming an active member of an organization, taking initiative, etc. (p. 67)

More recently the Corporate Council on Education (1992), an affiliate of the Conference Board of Canada, narrowed the critical skills required of the Canadian workforce into three broad categories. First, academic skills are those skills which provide the basic foundation to enable the new employee to be productive on their first day on the job and to increase their productivity as they mature. Included in these skills are academic achievement, the ability to apply specific knowledge, the ability to communicate effectively, and the ability to think critically and act logically. Second, personal management skills are a combination of the attitudes and behaviours required to get, keep, and progress on the job. Included in these skills are positive attitudes and behaviour, self-esteem and confidence, persistence, responsibility, adaptability, and creativity. Third, teamwork skills are those skills needed to work with others on a job and to achieve the best results. Included in these skills are the ability to function in interpersonal relationships, to understand and contribute to the organizations goals, to plan and make decisions with others, and to respect the thoughts and opinions of others.

These employability skills are the generic skills, attitudes and behaviours that employers in Canada look for in new recruits. They are arenas of growth and development and are important to the students' success once they have chosen their career. Having the opportunity to develop their attitudes and awareness to these skills and their chosen career, could better prepare them for the future.

Pascarella and Ferenzini (1991) succinctly summed up these skills as follows:

> And, indeed, we do often expect our colleges and universities to accomplish great things. In terms of educating undergraduate students, these include (but are certainly not limited to) such lofty goals as transmitting the intellectual heritage of Western civilization; fostering a high level of verbal and mathematical skills; developing an in-depth understanding of social, cultural, and political institutions; facilitating one's ability to think reflectively, analytically, critically, synthetically, and evaluatively; developing one's value structures and moral sensibilities; facilitating personal growth and self-identity; and fostering one's sense of career identify and vocational competence. In addition, there are the less lofty but fully appreciated goals of socializing the individual for effective functioning in society . . . . (p. 1.)

Conceptual Model

According to Leavitt and Bahrami (1988), everything affects everything else as volatile organizations change. The reasons for this are threefold:

> First, organizations are above all, dynamic human systems. They are not just the static structures depicted in organization charts, nor just random collections of people. Human organizations are constantly changing; they are both simple and complicated, both orderly and disorderly, both placid and volatile. Second, organizations are networks, usually quite loose ones, of tasks, structures, and information systems, which are managed and operated by fallible people. Third, organizations do not operate in a vacuum but within environments that are themselves in constant flux. (p. 246).

From this they envisioned a diamond model of the organization comprised of structure, people, task, and information, and control. These four components are all interconnected in the organization and when one is changed the impact is felt on the other three. (See Figure 3.)

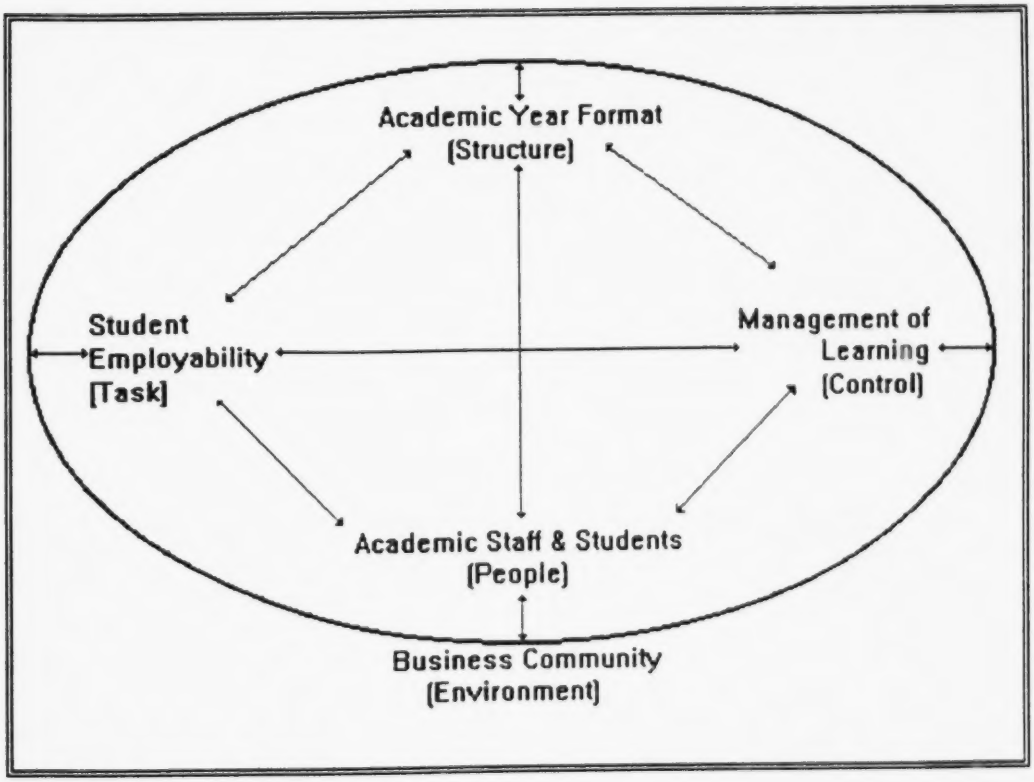


Figure 3. Interactive Nature of Task, Structure, People, Control, and Envrionment.

Structure involves a more or less permanent framework, involving some arrangement of processes and resources. In this pilot project, the structure of the Management Programs yearly academic format had to be modified from two 16-week semesters to two 13-week semesters so as to accommodate the six week work practicum. As a result, the scheduling of classrooms and computer labs, and the timetabling of instructors and students, in relation to the rest of the program, had to be changed significantly.

The organization, according to Leavitt et al. (1973) is populated by people, those "sometimes troublesome, but highly flexible, doers of work" (p. 4). The Management Program at NAIT is comprised of 20 full-time instructors, two assistant program heads, and a program head. Only five of these people were directly involved with the practicum and as a result the length of their instructional assignments varied in relation to those of other instructors. They were expected to teach the same course, with exactly the same content to different groups of students over different lengths of time. Course outlines, exam scheduling, and assignment dates had to be modified so as to accommodate both 13 and 16 week time periods. In addition, in this situation, the students can also be considered doers of work. They are required to attend classes, partake in numerous academic assignments, and successfully complete examinations.

Task can be defined as "what the organization does." Included in this definition is the product or service that the organization provides so that its purposes are accomplished. NAIT's mission, as stated in its academic calendar

(1994/95) is as follows: "The Northern Alberta Institute of Technology is dedicated to offering quality career education that fulfils the goals and expectations of our students while serving the needs of the economy" (p. 7). In its efforts to help NAIT accomplish this mission the Management Program's primary task, as part of a vocational postsecondary institute, is to prepare people for employment. The principal vehicle used to accomplish this task is through the delivery of a curriculum that helps to develop the skills that employers want. Any activity that contributes in a positive way to this is seen as desirable, and the introduction of the work practicum was intended to promote student employability.

Information and control, as outlined by Leavitt et al. (1973), deal with the technology of managing. It includes how the changing information and communication technologies affect the organization's control during its day to day activities. For the most part, instructors in postsecondary institutions are considered to be managers of their classrooms. They develop and deliver lectures, mark assignments, and in general, control and manage the learning process. The introduction of the work practicum resulted in outsiders becoming more involved in the learning process and thus the control function has been dispersed.

In addition, the organization does not exist in a vacuum. Changes within the organization not only affect what goes on inside the organization but also affect what goes on outside. Also, changes in the outside environment can have a

major impact on the internal organization. As was mentioned earlier, business needs are constantly changing and as a result the vocational postsecondary institution has to adapt to meet these needs. Likewise any internal change involving the education of students must be seen by the business community in a favorable light.

The interactive nature of structure, people, task, and control was summed up by Leavitt and Bahrami (1988) as follows:

> All of this is to say that organizations are dynamic, changing entities. If we input something into one part of the system, bells begin to ring and lights begin to flash all over the system, often in places we hadn't counted on and at times we hadn't expected .... The organization is influenced by its position in the broader environment. The organization lives in a pressing, crowded world. And it presses back. (pp. 251-252)

Summary

A review of the literature related to co-operative education and work practica was provided in this chapter. Initially, the history of experiential learning was reviewed, from its early beginnings, and up to its current use in Canada. The practice of linking place of learning to place of work stems from a long tradition of collaboration between academic institutions and the wider community.

The second section of this chapter described the benefits that are accrued to students, employers, and academic institutions, as a result of their participation in work practica. In general, it would appear that they offer students the opportunity to develop skills that are relevant to their career orientation;

employers are provided with a highly motivated source of part-time workers; and for educational institutions, a positive relationship with the business community is established.

Although it is evident that co-operative education is a popular activity in some geographical areas, it does have its detractors. The third section of this chapter explored the resistance that is encountered by proponents of co-op programs. Some of the American literature suggests that these programs operate nationally at a rather unimpressive level of magnitude and participation. However, most of these programs (90%) involve payment to the student for services rendered, and the majority of them (78%) lasts at least one semester (Wilson, 1987). As a result there is little research on those work experience programs that are relatively short (six weeks), and where the student receives no remuneration.

A model illustrating the nature and importance of experiential integration was presented in section four. According to this model, students should be given the opportunity to relate the practical experiences of their participation in a work practicum, to the theoretical knowledge that they gained in the classroom. By reflecting on their experience, it is hoped that students will be more motivated to seek the knowledge they need, in order to be more effective, rather than to passively receive knowledge that meets no immediate felt need.

Section five outlined the employability skills students need to become productive citizens, gain employment and progress on the job. Specifically,

according to the Conference Board of Canada (1992), these include academic skills, personal management skills, and teamwork skills.

Finally in section six, a conceptual model developed by Leavitt and Bahrami (1988), was presented to guide the research project. According to this model an organizational system includes four basic components: task, structure, people, and information and control. All four components are closely interrelated and a change in any one of them will affect all the others. The introduction of the work practicum into the Management Program's structure will not only affect the other three components but it could also have consequences in the external business environment.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

An overview of this study along with a review of the literature was provided in the first two chapters. This chapter outlines the research methodology that was used to conduct the study.

Data/Information Collection Procedures

Although some quantitative data were collected in the study, the majority of data was collected by utilizing group focus and in-depth interviews. Research procedures are described in the following section.

A. Students

According to Kress (1988), the group focus interview technique directs the conversation of the group around a particular topic, and both the researcher and participants know beforehand the general type of information being sought. He went on to state that the major contributions of group interviews include bringing the researcher closer to the data sources, stimulation of ideas, and an increased flexibility in obtaining data.

In November 1993, before embarking on their practicum, the participating students were interviewed by the researcher utilizing the group focus interview technique. The interview guide (Appendix A) focused on the students' perceptions of the organization and management of the work practicum and on their expectations in participating. An analysis and interpretation of these

interviews were undertaken and the results can be found in Chapter 4 of this study.

Two weeks after the completion of the practicum the seventeen participating students who completed the practicum were gathered together and requested to take part in the study. The students were made aware that this was a voluntary exercise and if they chose not to participate it would not in any way reflect on their studies at the Institute. As they had already agreed to participate in the practicum itself, all seventeen students expressed enthusiasm, in that they felt it would give them an opportunity to more fully express their comments and concerns. The students were randomly assigned to one of three groups. One group had seven students and there were five students in each of the other two groups.

A small conference room with a circular table was chosen for the interview site and the respondents and researcher were the only people involved with the interviews. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, and each of the three sessions lasted between 80 and 95 minutes. So as to focus these student interviews on the four specific research questions an interview guide (Appendix B) was developed and utilized.

B. Field Agency Representatives

As this study involved Canadian students, who in all likelihood would be seeking employment in Canada, it was thought to be prudent to develop a pre-work practicum questionnaire (Appendix C) that would reflect the perceived

needs of Canadian employers. To accomplish this, the Employability Skills Profile (Appendix D) developed by the Corporate Council on Education (1992) was used as the basis for its development. The purpose of this questionnaire was to obtain perceptions of the field agency representatives about the importance of the 21 employability skills listed. Also included in this questionnaire was an open-ended question, which was intended to solicit the field agency representatives' opinions as to how the participating students could exceed their expectations.

This questionnaire was mailed out to the 18 field agency representatives in November 1993. Thirteen of these questionnaires were returned and an analysis and interpretation was then undertaken. A simple discriptive statistical analysis was conducted. Means and standard deviation were calculated and the variables listed in order of importance. A qualitative analysis was also completed on the open-ended question involving "expectations." The results of this analysis and interpretation can be found in Chapter 4 of this study.

Upon completion of the work practicum, field agency representatives were contacted by the researcher so as to gain their consent to a post-practicum personal in-depth interview. The depth interview is an unstructured, direct person interview in which a single respondent is probed by an interviewer to uncover underlying motivation, attitudes, and feelings on a topic (Knox, 1986). The advantages of this type of interview include the enhanced willingness of participants to reveal confidential information, more detailed information can be obtained from one person and thus more insight is gained into that person's

thinking process, the interviews can be more easily arranged at the convenience of the interviewee, and the responses are untainted by group or peer pressure.

Fifteen of the eighteen participants consented to the interview. Due to downsizing in his organization one field agency representative was no longer employed by his company. Another was in the process of being relocated to another city and felt that he did not have the time for such an activity. The third non-participant was recently demoted and expressed a desire to no longer be included in the project. Appointments were then arranged at the offices of each of the fifteen field agency representatives.

These interviews consisted of two parts. First, a structured questionnaire (Appendix E) that closely paralleled the pre-work questionnaire, was given to the field agency representatives to determine their perceived thoughts on how well the students demonstrated the aforementioned employability skills. Fourteen questionnaires were returned to the researcher. A descriptive statistical analysis, similar to the one performed on the pre-work practicum questionnaire was completed. Second, an in-depth interview focusing on the organization and management of the practicum was undertaken. Each interview lasted between 25 and 30 minutes, and they were audio-recorded and transcribed. The researcher conducted all the interviews and made use of an interview guide (Appendix F).

C. Instructors

As with the field agency representatives, the in-depth interview technique was utilized when interviewing the five faculty members who were directly

involved with teaching the practicum students. Twelve weeks after the students had returned to class from their practicum, each instructor was requested to participate in an in-depth interview. Although it was an optional, voluntary activity, all five instructors agreed to contribute their views and concerns on the practicum. The interviews were held in each of the instructor's offices, they were audio recorded and transcribed, and each of them lasted between 20 and 25 minutes. An interview guide (Appendix G) was developed and used, so as to focus the interviews on the specific research questions.

Reliability

Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh (1985) stated that reliability "is the extent to which a measuring device is consistent in measuring whatever it measures" (p. 213). In other words, if the same research activities were repeated under similar circumstances, would the same results be obtained?

This study was both qualitative and quantitative in nature and focused on respondents' perceptions about the Management Program at NAIT. The employers, students, and faculty, though not randomly selected, were considered to be representative of their respective larger populations. Throughout each interview, perception checks were done to ensure that the researcher's interpretations were correct and that sufficient information had been received. Specifically the researcher repeated back or asked for clarification of any comment that could have been misinterpreted or misunderstood. In addition, all

respondents were encouraged to contact the researcher if they believed further insights would contribute to the project. Each of the interviews were audio recorded to ensure accuracy of recall and they were transcribed so as to provide the researcher with a hard copy.

Rudestam and Newton (1992) stated that triangulation involves "checking multiple sources of data such as other investigators, written records, diaries, field notes, and so on" (p. 39). Instructors, who were involved in teaching the participating students, were asked to record any comments they heard from the students concerning their experiences during the work practicum. These comments were compared with the transcribed interviews. In general, the comments and interviews appeared to portray the same perceptions.

The work practicum co-ordinator, who met with each of the field agency representatives on several occasions, was shown a sample of their transcribed interviews. The purpose of this was to confirm whether these notes reflected the general comments she received during her visitations. She believed they did.

The transcribed interviews from the instructors were also reviewed by the co-ordinator of the program. Before, during, and after the practicum she was in day-to-day contact with these instructors. After reviewing the transcriptions, she confirmed that they were an accurate reflection of the informal comments she had received.

Validity

Validity was defined by Kress (1988) as "how well the experiment measures what it claims to measure" (p. 137). That is, was the treatment totally responsible for the outcome, or did some other factor have some major impact?

Most of the work practicum students had previous part-time employment experiences and undoubtedly these experiences had an influence on their attitudes and awareness towards the importance of academic skills, personal management skills, and teamwork skills. Also, their background would have affected their career choice. However, by interviewing them immediately after the practicum, these influences probably were minimized and the validity of the study was maintained.

Face Validity

According to Zikmund (1994), face validity "refers to the subjective agreement among professionals that a scale logically appears to accurately reflect what it purports to measure" (p. 358). As previously mentioned, the field agency representative's pre- and post-practicum questionnaire was adopted from the Corporate Council on Education's Employability Skills Profile. The purpose of this profile was to outline foundation skills for employment. By using this profile as a basis for the development of the questionnaire, it was believed that face validity was established.

The students, field agency representatives, and the instructors' interview guides, as well as the field agency representatives' pre- and post-practicum questionnaire, were all developed so as to answer the general research question. As well, Leavitt and Bahrami's conceptual model, as shown on Page 33 of this study, was utilized to focus the research on this question.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to the Management Program at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. The study focused on the perceptions of the 17 students who completed the work practicum, the 15 field agency representatives who agreed to participate in the pilot project, and the five faculty members who taught the participating students other courses. Thus the findings are specifically for the stated program and participants, and caution should be exercised in generalizing beyond this group.

Limitations

1. The study focused on perceptions rather than behaviour. That is, the students were asked to share their perceptions as to whether or not the practicum met their expectations, and how it influenced their awareness of and attitudes towards their academic studies, personal management skills, teamwork skills, and vocational choice. Likewise, the field agency representatives, the

instructors, and practicum co-ordinator were asked to share their perceptions on the organization, management, benefits, and possible institutionalization of the practicum.

2. The group focus interviews, that were utilized to gather information from the students, made it impossible to identify the perceptions from specific individual students. However, during the transcription of the audio tapes, care was taken to separate the comments of each individual as they were received.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made in conducting the study.

Students

Although there was an uneven distribution of females to males (13 females, 4 males), in most other aspects the students who participated in the pilot project were consistent with the vast majority of students who enter the second year Management Program at NAIT. A successfully completed first year of study was the only pre-requisite to be accepted into the project. As a result, this group of students closely resembled not only the rest of the student body but also past student cohorts. Level of academic achievement, previous work experience, and age were all similar.

It is assumed that these students who participated in the pilot project were honest and sincere when they stated their perceptions.

Field Agency Representatives

A wide range of different organizations participated in the work practicum. Included were retail establishments, industrial and manufacturing concerns, and agencies from all three levels of government. As a result, it was assumed that the responses received from the field agency representatives would be typical of the responses received from most organizations who encouraged this type of activity. It was assumed that the field agency representatives had enough contact with the students during the practicum so as to be able to accurately express their perceptions, and that they were familiar with the needs of the business community and how these needs related to the skills required by students when entering the workforce.

Instructors

All five instructors involved with teaching the practicum students during their second year were representative of the rest of the faculty within the Management Program. Instructor area of expertise included human resource management, marketing, computer applications, accounting, and business management and policy. As a result, their perceptions would have coincided with the rest of the faculty, had they been involved with the practicum students. It was assumed that the faculty would be objective when responding to questions and not over protective of their own area of expertise.

Summary

This chapter outlined the research methodology that was used in conducting the study. Specifically data were collected between February and April 1994 from the three groups of stakeholders by utilizing both focus group and in-depth personal interviews. The seventeen students who successfully completed the practicum, fifteen of the participating field agency representatives, and all 5 instructors who were involved with teaching the students took part in the interviews.

Reliability was established with the use of both perception checks and triangulation. Validity was maintained by utilizing the Corporate Council on Education's Employability Skills profile and Leavitt and Bahrami's conceptual model. The study was delimited to the Management Program at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. In addition, the study's limitations and assumptions were outlined to provide a common basis for understanding.

CHAPTER 4

ACADEMIC CONTEXT AND ANTECEDENT DATA

This chapter describes the context in which the study was conducted. The chapter is divided into five sections. First, the extent and nature of co-operative education and work practica, as practised at NAIT, are reviewed. Second, the structure and content of the Management Program's current curriculum are outlined. Third, the establishment and development of the pilot project are described. Next, an analysis and interpretation of the participating students pre-practicum interviews are presented. Finally, the results of the analysis and interpretation of the pre-work practicum questionnaire that was sent out to the field agency representatives are discussed.

Co-operative Education and Work Practica at NAIT

Since its founding in 1963, NAIT has had a close working relationship with employers through its system of program advisory committees. This relationship with representatives from business and industry has made it possible to put in place a variety of experiential education programs, both in apprenticeship and in other career related training.

Apprenticeship training at NAIT is a combination of on-the-job and technical training that leads to certification as a qualified journeyman. Apprentices attend technical training courses for three to twelve weeks each year for up to four years. They are indentured to an employer for the remainder of

the year. NAIT offers apprenticeship training in 30 designated trades to approximately 7000 trainees each year (Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, 1992).

Examples of other programs at NAIT which include various forms of experiential learning are illustrated below (Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, 1994/95):

Animal Health Technology - Students spend six weeks of their two year program at an agricultural college to get hands-on experience in artificial insemination, clinical nursing, ear tagging, vaccination and similar tasks. In addition, they spend four weeks in a veterinarian clinic.

Combined Laboratory and X-Ray Technician - After nine months of full time training at NAIT, students take 26 weeks of practical lab and x-ray experience in rural hospitals.

Computer Systems Technology - An optional 16 week co-operative employment semester is available to students in this program. Students are paid by the employer during this time.

Dietary Technology - Students in this program receive eight months of theoretical training and are then required to spend eleven months of practical training at an approved institution.

Emergency Medical Technology (Paramedic) - The practicum component in this two year program consists of 42 weeks in both hospitals and ambulances.

Health Records Administration - After their first year of study students are expected to partake in a ten-week hospital practicum. During their second year an additional four weeks are required in medical clinics.

Medical Laboratory Technology - The first year of this program consists of 41 weeks of classroom instruction. A twelve month second year is then spent at an affiliated training hospital so that the student can be exposed to practical applications.

Dental Assisting - During this one year program students spend a half day per week in a dental practice. In addition, before graduating, students are expected to spend three weeks in a full-time practicum.

Radio and Television Arts - Students in this two year program are required to spend one 16 week period in a radio or television station before they graduate.

The Management Program at NAIT

There is a commitment at NAIT to maintain the relevance and currency of programs and courses. One such effort is referred to as program validation. The thrust of this procedure is to solicit the input of employers regarding the importance of skills and competencies that the graduate should possess, as well as to suggest additional areas which should be considered for inclusion in the program.

The most recent Management Program validation study was conducted in the fall of 1991. Each faculty member was asked to prepare a list of competencies

that students should possess as a result of completing their program. These were then reviewed by all faculty to ensure that the list presented to industry was an accurate reflection of the competencies acquired by a graduate of the program.

On October 2, 1991, a group of 18 business and industry representatives met at a Competency Profile Development workshop to validate the program's curriculum. The nature of this group was based on the typical company that tends to employ the program's graduates. Each competency was evaluated and rated by the participants for both entry-level skill requirements and for career advancement, according to the following criteria: Extremely important = 3, Important = 2, Somewhat Important = 1, and Not Important/Needed = 0. Also, participants were encouraged to add to, or modify, competencies in the profile. The results of the workshop, in the form of means, frequencies, and participant's comments, were reviewed by both the program staff and the workshop participants. The results obtained, for the human resource management component of the program, are illustrated in Appendix H.

The major findings of the study found that, in general terms, the competencies acquired by the graduates of the Management Program were a good match with those required by industry. Minor changes in emphasis in a small number of course areas were identified. For the most part, program competencies were rated higher for career advancement than they were for entry level positions. This would suggest that although the skills acquired by a graduate of the program

are important for entry level positions, the program prepares students more for the long term.

As a result of this program validation study, the program outline shown in Figure 4 was developed and is currently in use in the management program. Management students are required to take 12 courses in the first year and 11 courses in the second. However, those students who wish to enrol in the work practicum are required to take only 10 courses during the second year of their program. They are given 64 hours credit upon successful completion of the practicum (Figure 5).

Establishment of the Pilot Project

Students who successfully completed the first year Business Administration Program were invited to participate in the pilot project. After an intensive orientation session, which outlined the duration and nature of the project, 18 students elected to participate. In May, 1993, the search began for meaningful work placements.

Preliminary telephone contact was made with several organizations to determine if there was an interest in participating in the project. The nature of the project was outlined and included the following three pertinent points. First, the field agency representative was expected to provide the student with a full-time, six-week work experience opportunity that was directly related to the human resource management vocation. Second, no student payment was required,

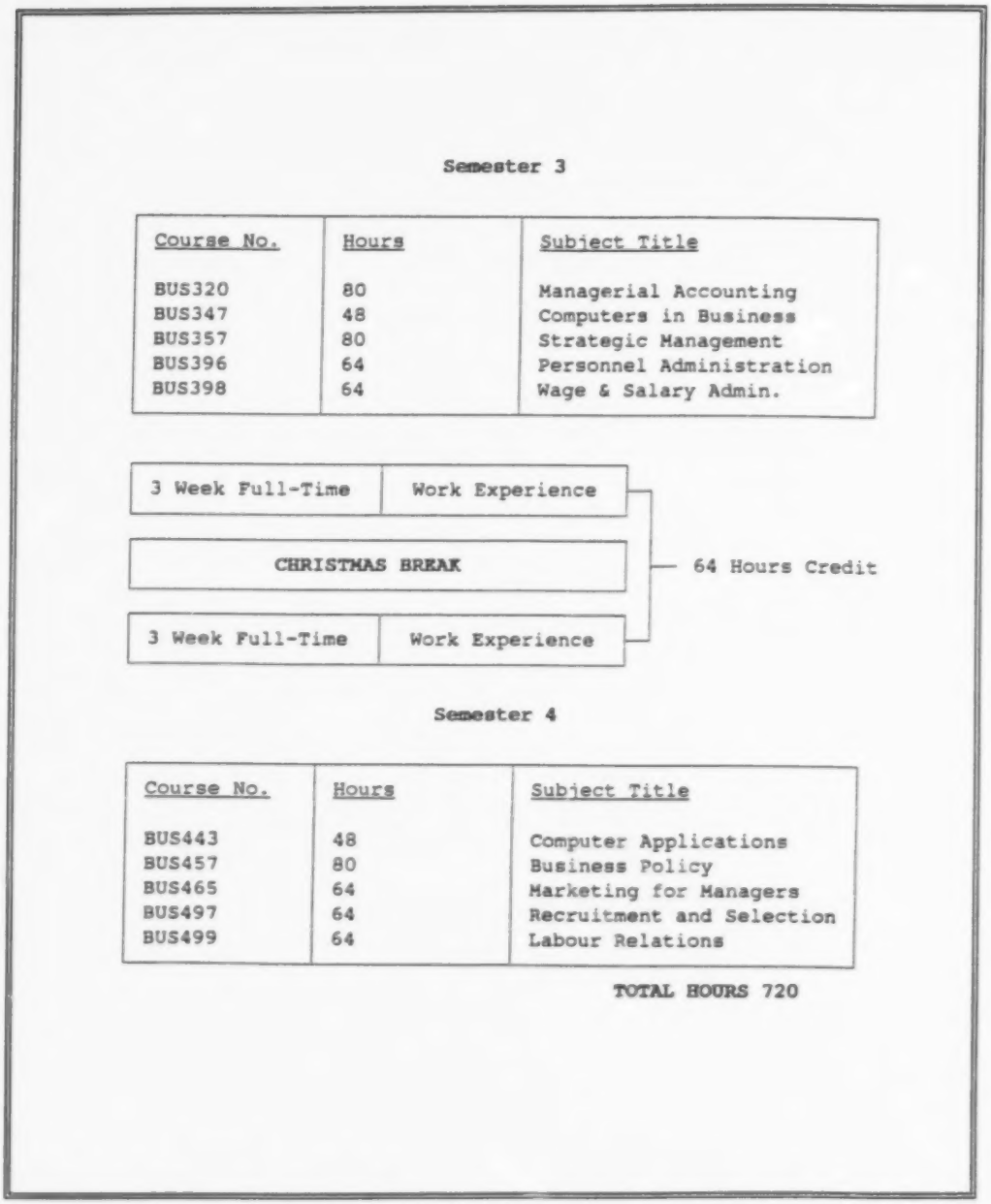
First-Year Courses (Semester 1)		Hours
BUS106	Accounting	64
BUS117	Business Mathematics	48
BUS121	Business Communications	64
BUS161	Business Law	64
BUS186	Economics	48
BUS191	Organizational Behaviour	64

First-Year Courses (Semester 2)		Hours
BUS166	Introduction to Marketing	64
BUS207	Accounting	64
BUS222	Business Communications	64
BUS287	Economics	64
BUS118	Business Statistics	80
BUS292	Organizational Behaviour	48
PLE123	Physical and Leisure Education (optional)	64

Second-Year Courses (Semester 3)		Hours
BUS320	Managerial Accounting	80
BUS347	Computers in Business	48
BUS356	Strategic Management I	80
BUS396	Human Resource Management	64
Approved Electives		
BUS300	Work Experience - Human Resource Management	64
BUS326	Payroll	32
BUS354	Purchasing	64
BUS355	New Venture Creation	64
BUS358	Personal Financial Management	64
BUS398	Wage and Salary Administration	64

Second-Year Courses (Semester 4)		Hours
BUS422	Managerial Finance	64
BUS443	Microcomputer Applications-Management	48
BUS457	Strategic Management II	80
BUS365	Marketing Management	64
Approved Electives		
BUS400	Community and Business Involvement	48
BUS455	Small Business Management	64
BUS470	Leadership Development	48
BUS493	Local Government Administration	80
BUS497	Recruitment and Selection	64
BUS499	Labour Relations	64

Figure 4. Management Program Outline.



Semester 3

Course No.	Hours	Subject Title
BUS320	80	Managerial Accounting
BUS347	48	Computers in Business
BUS357	80	Strategic Management
BUS396	64	Personnel Administration
BUS398	64	Wage & Salary Admin.

3 Week Full-Time	Work Experience	64 Hours Credit
CHRISTMAS BREAK		
3 Week Full-Time	Work Experience	

Semester 4

Course No.	Hours	Subject Title
BUS443	48	Computer Applications
BUS457	80	Business Policy
BUS465	64	Marketing for Managers
BUS497	64	Recruitment and Selection
BUS499	64	Labour Relations

TOTAL HOURS 720

Figure 5. Second Year Program Outline for Practicum Students.

however, compensation was expected for any extra-ordinary out-of-pocket expenses. Third, on-going feedback and assessment was to be given to the student during the placement, along with a final documented performance appraisal (Appendix I). Eighteen organizations (Appendix J) volunteered to take part in the project.

Once the field agency representative had agreed to participate, a thank-you letter (Appendix K) was sent. This letter also summarized the nature of the project. One month prior to the start of the practicum, each student was notified who their field agency representative would be, and was directed to make contact. A letter (Appendix L) was sent by the project co-ordinator informing the representatives that their student placements would be contacting them for a meeting. Included in this letter was a request to complete and return the pre-work practicum questionnaire (Appendix C). The purpose of this meeting was to give the student and the field agency representative an opportunity to discuss with one another their needs and expectations. Also, the practicum agreement (Appendix M) and the confidentiality agreement (Appendix N) were to be completed, signed, and returned to the co-ordinator.

During the practicum the co-ordinator visited each job site on two occasions. Very few problems materialized; however, one student was asked to withdraw for failing to fulfil the program's attendance requirements. All field agency representatives fulfilled their obligations, and completed evaluations were submitted for all participating students.

Student Pre-Work Practicum Analysis and Interpretation

After completing 12 weeks of their second year classes and before embarking on their work practicum, 16 of the participating students were interviewed to determine their motivation. Also, their expectations of the practicum along with their opinions of its organization and structure were sought. Data were obtained by utilizing a group focus interview methodology, and an interview guide (Appendix A). All three sessions, comprised of seven, five and four students, were audio recorded.

Motivation for Participation

According to the students, their motivation for participating in the practicum included such factors as it presented them with a unique opportunity, it looked good on their resume, it would help in their career decision making, and it would give them hands-on experience in a real-life atmosphere.

Expectations

Before these interviews were conducted all students knew who their field agency representatives were, what their job duties would entail, and all had been through an initial screening and interview.

Having meaningful jobs to perform was of paramount importance for the students. They did not want to spend their practicum doing what they perceived to be meaningless jobs such as filing or keyboarding. They fully expected to participate in human resource management activities and did not want to "sit around all day and do nothing." The job duties assigned by the field agency

representatives appeared to be varied and diverse in nature. Some involved applications of information technology to industrial relations and human resource management. Others addressed one or another aspects of the grievance and arbitration process. Two placements required the students to develop and conduct surveys of employee groups regarding benefits preferences. Other placements focused on collecting, organizing and delivering information to be used in the collective bargaining process. Finally, some of the students were involved in developing policies on such matters as sexual harassment and organizational development.

Students also requested feedback, both positive and negative, on a continuous basis. In other words, they wanted formative evaluations as opposed to one summative evaluation at the end of the practicum. However, included in these formative evaluations they desired to be taught the "right way" of doing things. In addition, they hoped this corrective counselling would be done in a compassionate and understanding way.

A major priority for students was to be accepted as part of the team and to "do what it takes" to accomplish this. During their practicum they wanted to be considered as an employee even though they were there as learners. They expressed a desire to take part in the total environment of an office, including the social aspects of corporate life. Their willingness to put in extra hours was most frequently mentioned as a way of accomplishing this.

All three groups stated that although they were satisfied with their

placement they would have preferred to have had more input into where they were going to be placed. However, two groups did mention that they realized it was a pilot project and they believed it was necessary for the co-ordinator to make the placements with minimum input.

All three student groups expressed complete satisfaction with the level of support they received from the co-ordinator. Their only concern was that the same level of support would not continue throughout the entire practicum. Specifically they expected that the co-ordinator would continue to maintain the 24-hour answering machine so that any concerns could be dealt with as soon as possible. Also, they expected that she would visit each work site at least twice during the six week practicum.

Opinions and Feelings

Orientation session. All three groups felt that the orientation sessions were vague and that in the future more information should be given to the students. However, once again, students expressed the view that the nature of a pilot project dictates to a large extent how much information can be disseminated by its co-ordinator.

Organization of the practicum. The Management Program's course outline (Figure 4) illustrates that during their second year most students are required to take eight compulsory courses along with three approved electives. However, to accommodate the 13 week schedule the work practicum students were not required to take Managerial Finance, and in addition, they were not given the

opportunity to choose their own electives. Wage and Salary Administration, Recruitment and Selection, and Labour Relations became compulsory courses.

Although all three groups felt these courses were appropriate, most would have liked to have had the opportunity to choose their own. Specifically, they considered it unfair that the Leadership Development course would not be made available to them. They believed that this course could have been included in their program if the Human Resource Management and the Wage and Salary Administration courses were combined into one.

Structure of the practicum. In early September 1993, before the students began their second year courses, the practicum co-ordinator outlined in detail the structure of their academic year. The students were warned beforehand that 16 weeks of study would be compressed into 13 weeks, and that this could present a problem to those students who did not keep up in their studies. In addition, they were told that they would be "out of sync" with the rest of the students in that their midterms and final exams would be held at different times. Also, social activities, particularly those that occur just before Christmas, would be unavailable to them because they would be away from the institute on their practicum.

All three groups expressed the view that they enjoyed the quicker pace of the thirteen week semester. They perceived that there was less pressure on them to perform, in that the accelerated pace forced them to focus more on their studies. In addition, one group stated that they were fearful they would get behind in their studies and as a result their class attendance improved. One

student summed this up as follows: "It hasn't been as hard as I thought it was going to be. They made it sound like we were going to be under the gun from the first day. I did not feel as pressured as I did in the first year. I didn't even notice we were going faster."

The participating students enjoyed having their midterm examinations a week before the rest of the students. They did not feel the stress and pressure associated with midterm examination week. However, the students believed that during the regular midterm period their classes were poorly organized. "It was like they forgot about us. Three of our computer classes were cancelled and we were locked out of some of our classrooms. Instructors were late for class and were slow in making assignments. They were too busy marking mainstream students' midterms."

Preparedness for the work practicum. All students felt well prepared to enter their job positions and believed that the course content taught in the third semester would be very applicable to their work practicum.

Desired Changes for the Future

Even though the students felt that the course content prepared them for their practicum, they expressed some concern about entering an unfamiliar job setting. As a result, it was suggested that a one day orientation on the work site would be desirable, so as to alleviate some of their anxiety.

Field Agency Representatives' Pre-Work Practicum Analysis and Interpretation

The results obtained on the field agency representatives' perceptions, on the importance of the listed employability skills for students beginning their practicum, are presented in Table 1. The results indicate, that for the most part, the field agency representatives concurred with the Corporate Council on Education, in that most of the listed skills were considered important or very important.

Academic Skills

The average mean (4.01) for academic skills was the lowest among the three broad categories of skills (M = 4.13). However, within this category, the field agency representatives perceived "listen to understand and learn" (M = 4.69) to be the most important skill for students about to enter a practicum. The ability to "assess and apply specialized knowledge in human resource management" (M = 3.54) was rated as the least important skill of the 21 skills listed. When comparing the average mean for communication skills (4.19) as opposed to thinking skills (3.77), it was considered more important, by the field agency representatives, for the student to possess good communications skills.

Personal Management Skills

Personal management skills were perceived as being the most important category of skill for students beginning their practicum. The average mean for the nine listed skills under this category was 4.22. "A positive attitude toward learning, growth and personal health" (M = 4.61), and "the ability to

TABLE 1

Field Agency Representatives' Perceptions on the Importance of Employability Skills for Students Beginning their Practicum

ITEM	FREQUENCY 1	2	3	4	5	N	MEAN	S.D.	RANK
ACADEMIC SKILLS - Those skills which provide the basic foundation to get, keep and progress on a job and to achieve the best results									
Communicate									
• Understand and speak the language in which business is conducted	0	2	2	1	8	13	4.15	1.21	8
• Write effectively in the language in which business is conducted	0	1	1	5	6	13	4.23	0.93	7
• Listen to understand and learn	0	0	0	4	9	13	4.69	0.48	1
• Read, comprehend and use written materials, including graphs, charts and displays	0	2	2	7	2	13	3.69	0.95	11
Average mean for communication skills							4.19		
Think									
• Think critically and act logically to evaluate situations, solve problems, and make decisions	0	0	3	5	5	13	4.15	0.80	8
• Use technology, instruments, tools, and information systems effectively	0	1	5	5	2	13	3.62	0.87	12
• Access and apply specialized knowledge in Human Resource Management	0	1	5	6	1	13	3.54	0.83	13
Average mean for thinking skills							3.77		
Average mean for academic skills							4.01		

• The scale used for these items was as follows: 1 = not at all important; 2 = not so important; 3 = fairly important; 4 = important, 5 = very important.

TABLE 1 (cont'd)

ITEM	FREQUENCY 1	2	3	4	5	N	MEAN	S.D.	RANK
PERSONAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS - The combination of skills, attitudes and behaviours required to get, keep and progress on a job and to achieve the best results									
Positive Attitudes and Behaviours Demonstrate the following:									
• Self-esteem and confidence	0	0	3	9	1	13	3.84	0.55	10
• A positive attitude toward learning, growth, and personal health	0	0	0	6	7	13	4.61	0.51	2
• Initiative, energy, and persistence to get the job done	0	0	0	7	6	13	4.46	0.52	4
Average mean for positive attitudes and behaviours							4.30		
Responsibility									
• The ability to set goals and priorities in work and personal life	0	1	2	6	4	13	4.00	0.91	9
• The ability to plan and manage time, money, and other resources to achieve goals	0	2	1	5	5	13	4.00	1.08	9
• Accountability for actions taken	0	0	2	5	6	13	4.36	0.75	5
Average mean for responsibility							4.12		
Adaptability									
• Demonstrate a positive attitude toward change	0	0	1	7	5	13	4.61	0.51	2
• Recognition of and respect for people's diversity and individual differences	0	0	0	4	9	13	4.31	0.75	6
• The ability to identify and suggest new ideas and to get the job done - creativity	0	0	2	6	5	13	3.84	0.55	10
Average mean for adaptability							4.25		
Average mean for personal management skills							4.22		

• The scale used for these items was as follows: 1 = not at all important; 2 = not so important; 3 = fairly important; 4 = important, 5 = very important.

TABLE 1 (cont'd)

ITEM	FREQUENCY 1	2	3	4	5	N	MEAN	S.D.	RANK
TEAMWORK SKILLS - Those skills needed to work with others on a job and to achieve the best results									
Work with Others									
• Understand and contribute to the organization's goals	0	0	3	9	1	13	3.84	0.55	10
• Understand and work within the culture of the group	0	0	1	9	3	13	4.15	0.55	8
• Plan and make decisions with others and support the outcomes	0	0	2	9	2	13	4.00	0.58	9
• Respect the thoughts and opinions of others in the group	0	0	1	4	8	13	4.53	0.66	3
• Exercise "give and take" to achieve group results	0	0	1	8	4	13	4.23	0.60	7
Average mean for teamwork skills							4.15		
Average mean for three categories of skills							4.13		

* The scale used for these items was as follows: 1 = not at all important; 2 = not so important; 3 = fairly important; 4 = important, 5 = very important.

demonstrate a positive attitude toward change" (M = 4.61) were perceived by the field agency representatives as being the second most important skills. In general, positive attitudes and behaviours (M = 4.30), were considered more important than were responsibility (M = 4.12) and adaptability (M = 4.25). However, the differences in means between these three were quite minimal.

Teamwork Skills

The second most important category of skill, as perceived by the field agency representatives, was teamwork skills (M = 4.15). "Respect for the thoughts and opinions of others in the group" (M = 4.52) was ranked as the third most important individual skill. The least important skill within this category was to "understand and contribute to the organization's goals" (M = 3.84).

Field Agency Representatives' Thoughts on Exceeding Expectations

The field agency representatives were asked to comment on how they felt the work practicum students could exceed the expectations of the organizations in which they were working. Three general themes--initiative, personal work habits, and technical knowledge emerged.

Initiative. To exceed the field agency representatives' expectations, the willingness to take the initiative and be proactive was the most frequently mentioned attribute a student could possess. Comments reflecting this attitude included the following:

> To come up with new ideas and ways of doing things in the office.
>
> Demonstrate confidence by taking the initiative to make suggestions, to go the extra mile and to ask questions so as to understand the big

picture.

To anticipate the next step and be prepared to take the initiative and make things happen.

It is important to be an individual who listens well and takes initiative, within the set out guidelines.

The ability to quickly grasp and analyze situations, to be proactive, to take the initiative and follow-through.

To be creative, that is, to suggest ideas as opposed to waiting to be asked, to be inquisitive.

Ability to roll with the changes and respond quickly to new demands.

Personal work habits. The second most frequently mentioned attribute that the field agency representatives mentioned involved personal work habits. Comments such as the following were made:

Possession of an excellent work ethic, punctuality, and a professional demeanour.

Professional business image and appropriate clothing conducive to a human resource management shop.

To become an ambassador outside the organization, to portrait a positive picture to the external public.

Ability to get projects done, work independently, to assist others and to work outside the realm of responsibility.

Ability to work with others within a team setting.

Technical knowledge. Only a few comments were made by the field agency representatives to indicate that if students were to exceed expectations they would have to demonstrate specific human resource management skills. Following were the statements made:

> The practitioner must be someone who can see the big picture and this can only be accomplished by achieving the number smaller, specific tasks on a day-to-day basis.
>
> Through interviewing skills, and to take extreme care with the accuracy and confidentiality of information.
>
> To possess a keen interest in learning all the functions, in that human resources is an area best suited to creative and flexible people.

Summary

The academic context and antecedent data for the study were provided in this chapter. It began by outlining the magnitude of experiential learning as it now exists at NAIT. A description of the Management Program was then presented along with an outline illustrating the academic year format utilized by the students who participated in the practicum. The establishment of the pilot project was then described with particular emphasis given to the recruitment of field agency representatives. Specifically, when these individuals were first contacted, it was specified that this practicum was different from the conventional co-operative work experience programs in that it was only six weeks in length, and the students did not get paid. In addition, the procedure for the conduct of the practicum was specified.

The results of the student pre-work practicum interviews were then presented. Their motivation for participation, expectations, and opinions and feelings were discussed. The students elected to participate in the practicum because they believed that their chances for future employment would be

enhanced. However, they felt it was very important to have meaningful jobs during the practicum. The change from a sixteen to a thirteen week semester was seen as positive in that the students perceived they were able to focus more on their studies.

Finally an analysis and interpretation of the field agency representatives pre-work practicum questionnaire, including their perceptions as to the importance of the various employability skills, was given. All skills were considered to be relevant but personal management skills were deemed to be most important for a student beginning a work practicum.

CHAPTER 5

STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS

In the previous chapter the academic content and antecedent data for the study were presented. The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings from the interviews that were held with the student groups, and the personal in-depth interviews that were conducted with the field agency representatives and the instructors. Following each of the three sections is a summary of these perceptions and comments in tabular form.

Students

Expectations

In Chapter 4, the students' expectations by participating in the work practicum were summarized. These expectations included having a meaningful job to perform, receiving feedback on a continuing basis, and being considered part of the team. In general, they wanted to be given the same opportunities and treated as a regular employee. They also stated they were willing to do "whatever it takes" to fulfil their own expectations of receiving a meaningful learning experience. In addition, they expressed a desire to have the same level of support during their practicum as they had before they started it. Following are the students' perceptions as to the extent to which their expectations were met.

Field agency representatives. Most students perceived that the company to which they were assigned met their expectations. The belief that they received

meaningful and interesting jobs and the necessary support when performing their assigned tasks, and the fact that they felt they were included as part of the organization, seemed to be the principal reasons behind their contentment. Following are some of the comments that reflected this feeling:

> I was looking for someone with an open mind and when I went to my placement I found more than an open mind. They were willing to help me and it was a great place to work.
>
> I would say that I did more things than I ever expected. They exposed me to many different areas of work and this was beyond my expectations.
>
> They made me feel part of the organization. In the first couple of days I was invited to attend various meetings and they asked for my input right off the bat.
>
> They were very interested. My supervisor didn't know what to expect so he gave me projects to do and found out just what I was capable of.
>
> They were really good. I though I would get a little desk in the corner somewhere. I had my own office. I would really like to work for that company.
>
> They met my expectations. I was very involved with day-to-day activities. I thought it was really good. I got to go everywhere.
>
> My employer met my expectations totally. They sent me to the human resource department and I did projects with them but, more important, I went to management meetings. I learned more than just human resources.
>
> In the beginning I felt like I was just doing clerical jobs. However, they eventually got more trust in me and I was able to do more meaningful jobs.
>
> At first my expectations were not met, so I had to be proactive. When I started, I had a lot of dead time so I went around and bugged people. Eventually they took me under their wing and I learned a great deal.

> Even though they did not know what to expect, they gave me meaningful jobs. I think their expectations of me were quite low and when I did a good job they were pleasantly surprised. It was a great experience.

> She hadn't planned what I would do so I had to come up with my own plan. I really felt that this gave me the opportunity to show her what I could do. As a result, I was given interesting jobs to do.

> They gave me a chance and if I messed up it was alright. They let me make my own mistakes and then they would show me the right way of doing it.

However, not all students felt that the field agency representatives met their expectations:

> I thought it would be much more hands on. All I did was sit in an office and do research all day. I didn't really get to see any aspect of what they did there. It was a little disappointing. I thought I would see more of what they did in the office--like compensation, safety or job descriptions. However, I did learn a lot on the research topic that I was working on.

> They felt I would learn more if I stayed in one place and I was stuck in one area for the whole six weeks. I didn't enjoy it but I did learn something.

Students. All students perceived that they met their own expectations during their work practicum. When asked if they accomplished what they wanted to do, if they made a contribution, and if they felt they learned something, all students expressed positive views. This perception was illustrated by the following comments:

> Yes, I surprised myself. I did better than I thought I could. I didn't know I was capable of doing those things.

> I thought they would give me something and I would look like a real dummy. I ended up gaining a lot more confidence because when I finished they told me that I did really good work.

I think it opened my mind in the sense that I thought I could not function in such an environment.

With me a lot of projects were not specific to what we had taken in class, but it gave me a good overview of that particular area of personnel. New aspects were covered that were not covered in class. A lot of new things such as health and safety are not covered in any detail in any of our courses.

I got very good feedback on one particular project because they gave the same assignment to a student from the U of A and he couldn't do it.

Yes, I learned what a human resource department is all about . . . what they actually do.

I think they had low expectations because they seemed to be thrilled at what I did, and I didn't think I did that much. They seemed impressed, so I must have done a really good job.

I believe I made a contribution because on the last day I had to do my presentation on what I was working on. They said I did a fantastic job and some even said they could learn from it. It made me feel good.

I think I did a good job but they also told me I was doing a good job, how I was such a big help. I was really trying hard and they saw it. I worked even when I wasn't there--I had to read at night.

My evaluation was really good. I was almost crying when they were doing it.

We had a university student from Montreal and the president of the company told me that compared to this student I was "head and shoulders" above him. This guy ended up being fired; they were not impressed with him at all. My supervisor took me for lunch the last day I was there and stated that the president himself wished me good luck with my career.

I learned things that I didn't learn at school, particularly in the area of research. I had to research articles and report on what I found. It was an area of personnel that I didn't even think was done. It was a real eye opener.

Job placement. Before the practicum started each field agency representative was required to give the assigned student a proposed job description. When asked if these job descriptions accurately reflected what they actually did during the practicum, most students expressed the opinion that they did not. However, no negative impact was perceived by the students as a result of this. When questioned further, it was the students' perception that specific job descriptions could be detrimental to their placements. They all wanted meaningful work in human resources but they didn't know specifically what they wanted to do. They perceived that a job description could limit their flexibility. In addition, they felt that it would also limit the field agency representatives' discretion. Following are some of the comments germane to this perception:

> My company didn't really know what I was going to do until I got there. What I did was entirely different than what the job description stated. However, this was no big deal because I did meaningful work--a job description is not all that important.

> Even though they gave me a job description they didn't know what to do with me during the first couple of weeks. They started giving me a few little things and then as I progressed they gave me more to do. It was like they were testing me. This gave me the opportunity to do a number of different things. It was enjoyable.

> When I got there they asked me what I wanted to do. My supervisor wasn't even aware that I received a job description. What I ended up doing was really good in that I got to work in the compensation area--an interesting area that I hadn't even considered.

> My company gave me meaningful jobs that were related to human resources. They were not tied into a specific job description and as a result I was able to experience a number of different things.

Program co-ordinator. As stated in Chapter 4, one of the students' main concerns was that they would not receive the same level of support during their practicum as they did before they started it. As evidenced by their comments the students did perceive that the co-ordinator provided them with the necessary amount of support. However, some students felt that she was too positive and they did not always equate that positive attitude with support. Following are some of the comments received when they were asked whether or not the co-ordinator met their expectations:

> She was very supportive. I thought she did a good job. She was very interested in everything that went on.
>
> At times she was almost too supportive. Everything was wonderful no matter what you did. Possibly a little corrective criticism would have been worthwhile.
>
> She was very positive but it was almost superficial. She would meet with me on a regular basis, and that was good, but there was never a negative comment. This was my first job in an office and I could not have been that good.
>
> We are supposed to learn from our mistakes but it would appear that I didn't make any. I did appreciate the positive attitude though.

Organization and Preparation

During the group focus interviews, the students were asked for their perceptions of the structure and organization of the practicum. In addition, they were also asked to comment on how well NAIT prepared them to partake in this activity.

The organization and structure of the practicum. In Chapter 4, it was stated that before the students went on their practicum they were very positive

towards the 13-week semester. They perceived that the accelerated pace helped them focus more on their studies and they felt their attendance improved. When asked if their perception had changed after taking the practicum, they confirmed that they still liked the 13 week semester, but they felt the instructors would have to change their mind-set so as to better facilitate work practicums in the future.

> The 13 week semester helped me to concentrate and focus on my courses. However, I did feel that the instructors were thinking 16 weeks, as opposed to 13 weeks, when handing out assignments. I had a hard time getting all of their requirements in on time.
>
> In the future the instructors are going to have to pace themselves a little better. Hopefully in the future the first two weeks of the semester can be better utilized so that the same pace is maintained throughout the semester. We started slow, and all of a sudden an instructor would realize that midterms were approaching, and we would then have to go really quick.
>
> The pressure was really on at the end of the semester, particularly in computers. It would have helped to have the work spread out a little more. I am sure that if the 13 weeks are better planned in the future the students will like it a lot better.
>
> I liked the 13 week semester better than the 16 week semester we had in the first year. However, we were watched much more closely by our instructors. If I missed a class the instructors would ask me where I was, and they would offer to help me make up anything I missed--a lot of babysitting took place.

The students confirmed that the integrative nature of the practicum was beneficial and should not be changed. In addition, for the most part, they perceived that six weeks of continuous work gave them ample time to benefit from their practicum. Also, the Christmas break was not perceived as being detrimental to their learning experience.

> Six weeks was excellent. I felt that I was fairly productive from day one and I was told that I made a positive contribution. By the end of the practicum I was ready to return to school.
>
> The practicum has already helped me prepare for the fourth semester. I'm anxious to question my instructors on some of the things I learned while on my practicum.
>
> I liked the six week time period. The practicum should not be held at the end of the school year in April. It would be difficult to look for permanent work while working for someone else.
>
> Having the practicum extend over the Christmas break was very positive. It gave me a chance to experience both the work and social aspects of a business office.
>
> It would be a mistake to change the structure of the practicum to one day a week. The continuous nature of the practicum gave me the opportunity to really get involved with the company.
>
> The six week period is good, not too long, not too short. However, I believe I would have been more productive if I had a chance to visit the company for a couple of days before I started the practicum. It would have helped me get up to speed a little more quickly.
>
> The time I spent on the practicum was just right. I don't think it should be more than six weeks. If it was longer I would be under too much pressure to complete the work at school in fewer weeks, and I wouldn't want the year to be extended.

According to the students the work practicum had no adverse affect on their social activities. The students perceived that in most cases the inclusion of the practicum actually helped them experience a more rewarding social environment.

> We were able to get together to study for exams more so than other students because we were in the same class for every course. A close cameraderie was developed.

> We had our own Christmas party. We stuck together a lot of the time. Not only did we get together for our Christmas party but we also attended the Christmas parties at our placements.

As was previously mentioned the students were not paid during their practicum. When asked if they should be paid, most students said "no." In general, they believed that by not getting paid they received a better learning experience.

> If they paid us it would change from a learning experience to an employment experience. That is, it would become employer centered--they would want to get their money's worth.
>
> The emphasis would shift from "we want to see how much you can benefit from this" to "we want to see how much we can benefit from this".
>
> If we were paid it would create more problems than it would solve. Other employees would respond and react to you differently, and as a result I don't think they would be willing to help you very much.
>
> No, we should not be paid. The practicum is only six weeks long and there is too much of a learning curve. I don't think, even after six weeks, that I was fully productive.
>
> It would not be realistic to expect payment. Besides, if they paid me, they may expect that I would have to pay them for all the training they gave me.
>
> A lot of us got a choice of projects. We would not have been given all these opportunities if they paid us. We were there as learners and as learners we should not get paid.
>
> They hired someone while I was there and I could see how they treated an employee compared to a student. The employee was told that he had to do an assignment because he was getting paid for it. I got a choice of assignments.
>
> By not getting paid I was able to read up on things like the collective agreement, job descriptions, and the rules and regulations.

> I don't think I would have had the chance to do this if I was being paid.
>
> My payoff was not money. I wanted to apply what I learned at NAIT. If I was paid I would have done only what they wanted me to.

Preparation. Most students felt that NAIT had well prepared them for their practicum. However, they did offer suggestions so as to better prepare future participants. Specifically, they perceived that the field agency representatives could be better informed about the Management Program, and the skills the students possessed.

> Possibly you could give each employer a course outline before the practicum and by doing this they would know what we could do. I was quite uncomfortable at first because I had to explain what I had done at school, and that I was quite capable of doing a number of different things.
>
> My employer didn't have much to go on except for my resume. He was completely in the dark and didn't know what to expect from me. For a while it was uncomfortable for both of us.
>
> My supervisor had no idea of what I was capable of. However, he was pleasantly surprised when he found out that I was computer literate. In the future NAIT should provide each employer with a competency profile of the students. In this way a comfort zone can be more quickly established.

Awareness of and Attitude Towards Academic, Personal Management, and Teamwork Skills

In Chapter 2 the employability skills needed by the Canadian workforce, as determined by the Conference Board of Canada, were presented. Academic, personal management, and teamwork were the three categories of skills deemed necessary by this organization. During the group focus interviews the students

were asked if the practicum had any impact on their awareness of, and attitude towards, these skills.

Academic skills. When queried as to the relevance of their completed coursework, most students were very supportive of the communication courses. However, they did perceive a need for a greater emphasis in this area, particularly in written communications. The material included in the human resource management course, the computer course, and the two organizational behaviour courses were also perceived to be very important for the human resources practitioner. However, many courses, including accounting, mathematics, statistics, and economics were perceived as not being relevant. The accounting courses were especially singled out as having little relevance to the human resource management vocation. Following are the comments which reflected the students' awareness of and attitudes towards their academic studies:

> The communication courses really helped a lot as did our computer course. It made me feel good that I could operate a computer because most of the people in the office didn't have a clue. No one in the office was under 40, and many of them were trying to upgrade their skills at night school. I was able to help them even though it was not part of my job.
>
> When it came to writing my research report for my presentation the communication courses really helped. However, more emphasis should be placed on writing. It's easy to speak it but it's different when you have to write it. A listening course would also be very beneficial.
>
> University students write paper after paper and they become good at it. More emphasis should be given by non-communication instructors on the importance of good writing skills.

The most valuable thing is communications--I had a lot of reports to write. However, why we were taught Wordperfect 5.1 is beyond me. I didn't use it at all. Most companies, as far as I could tell, use Word for Windows.

Computers should not be part of communications. The instructor has to spend too much time teaching the mechanics of how to use the computer instead of actually teaching us to write properly. Computers should be a course in itself and should not be combined with the communication courses.

I really didn't see any need for all the number-crunching courses we take at NAIT. Even the payroll was all done on computer. I was told that accounting is not needed in a human resource management department.

The material we learned in the Human Resource Management course was certainly helpful--it tied in well with what I did during the placement. However, in other courses there was no relationship at all. I still don't know the importance of accounting.

A lot of things that were taught in Human Resource Management were helpful because they gave me a lot of different jobs to do. Also, communications was very useful. However, accounting--that's another story.

The jargon used in human resources is universal--it was good to know what everyone was talking about. We learned a lot of jargon in class, jargon that I didn't realize was used in the real world, but it is used.

A lot of our courses didn't seem to have any relevance to what I did. Accounting, economics, statistics, and law aren't used in personnel. However, the communication courses and the Human Resource Management course was very beneficial. Maybe the practicum was too short and as a result I didn't get the opportunity to apply the theory taken in all courses.

Communications was the most important course I took during the first year. We need better writing skills--I had to do so many letters and memos. We should also have listening skills included in our communication courses.

> The organizational behaviour courses were really good. They taught me the importance of Herzberg's writings, job security, morale, etc. If you are going to work in human resources you need some of this theory.
>
> The statistics, math, and economics courses were useless. But I guess you have to include them in first year because students don't know which way they are going to go in the second year.

Personal management. Learning the importance of personal management skills was perceived by the students as one of the major benefits they received as a result of participating in the work practicum. In particular, they stated that they were much better prepared to conduct a job search for permanent employment. Following were some of the comments received:

> It has definitely contributed to my personal growth. I've become much more organized and I have learned a lot more organizational skills.
>
> If I didn't participate in the practicum I would have only emphasized my academic skills when looking for work. However, everyone has good academic skills and employers are looking for more than that. I now know that I have to emphasize my interpersonal skills.
>
> I know what to expect now. I now know what an office job is like and as a result what an employer expects. I was always in retail before.
>
> I had a chance to see what goes on in an office, what other people's jobs are like, what they do on a daily basis.
>
> It was a reality check. I now know its going to be difficult to find employment in human resource management but I also know that I am much better prepared for my job search.
>
> My expectations have decreased and this is positive because I am now better prepared mentally. I fully expected that there would be lots of jobs in human resources. Had I not taken the practicum I would have been devastated if I didn't find employment immediately. I now know it's going to take some time.

> I became more familiar with uncertainty. At school everything is structured but in the real world that structure is not there. This will help me better prepare for the future.

Students also mentioned that they became aware of the importance of creativity and critical thinking.

> To be creative in school is quite easy because you are competing against other students who have not had much experience. However, in the job world people have been around for years, and have seen and tried lots of different things. To be considered creative is considered very important but it is much more difficult because your competition is much more experienced.

> You have to think harder. Its not as easy to come up with something new and unique when working for a well established organization.

> I was encouraged to be a lot more creative than what I was, and I thought I was a very creative person. The competition to be creative in industry is much more intense than what it is in school.

Having the opportunity to work in a tense environment was another perceived benefit that students mentioned when asked if their job placement contributed to their personal management skills. The following comments reflected this feeling:

> In the company I was working for it was very tense, so much so that I was shipped off to another part of the company for a day. There was extreme tension--people were very careful what they said and did. My supervisor was very helpful. He told me that it was good to experience these problems because it's the norm in the personnel department.

> I wasn't sure what to expect from my company because they were downsizing quite a bit. They laid off about 10 employees so I thought there would be a lot more turmoil than what there was. It was a lot happier environment than I thought it would be; it wasn't as hectic as I thought with all that job insecurity. It's interesting how people can adapt to adverse conditions.

> Two people got laid off in the human resources department so I felt some of the remaining employees were looking at me pretty closely. I felt the pressure but I guess that's good because I'll be under pressure when I start work.

> When I started, the department was on two floors and by the time I left everyone was on one floor. Up to the time I started, the department was split up into smaller areas but during my stay they wanted to build a single team. This caused a lot of concern among the workers and I could feel the pressure, and believe me it was not the same as the so-called pressure at school. This was real life.

Teamwork. The students expressed different perceptions as to whether or not their awareness of and attitude towards teamwork changed as a result of participating in the practicum. Some felt that they had the opportunity to work with others and as a result they were able to experience the value of teamwork.

> My company stressed a team concept. Their philosophy stated that if something fails you cannot blame it on anybody, but if it succeeds, it's because of everybody.

> There were deadlines to be met and as a result teamwork was absolutely necessary. We all had to pull together to get the project finished on time. It was very much a team effort.

> Teamwork involves different individuals with different backgrounds. At NAIT we are all from the same background. In industry it's much different. My company had production people, accounting people, marketing people and then there was me, from personnel. Each individual was looking for different attributes when we interviewed people for jobs. It was hard to satisfy everyone but we were able to come to conclusions. A lot of give and take is important if a team is to operate effectively.

> At my company it wasn't even called "Human Resources." Instead they called it "Team for People." The head of the department was called the team leader--teamwork was really stressed.

> I felt that I was part of a team because the importance of teamwork was always stressed. There were team meetings every morning. Everyone was there to assist each other and not to tell one another

what to do. It was a comfortable atmosphere.

Some students felt that they did not work long enough at their placement, and as a result, they could not determine whether the practicum influenced their perception as to the value of teamwork. Others were given individual assignments.

> I didn't really get a chance to work with others. I was given a project, an important one, and I worked on it myself.
>
> I didn't really work long enough to become part of a team. However, everyone was friendly and I was invited to the social functions.
>
> The practicum was only six weeks. If you don't work with a number of different teams it's impossible to tell if teamwork is important. If you only have time to work with one group, and if that group doesn't get along, then you are going to have a very distorted view of teamwork.

Awareness of and Attitude Towards Career Choice

All students believed that the practicum was a good experience. However, when asked if their awareness of and attitude towards the human resource management vocation had changed, the students expressed mixed views. Some perceived that the practicum solidified their desire to pursue a career in human resources and the following comments illustrated these feelings:

> I still think I would like to pursue something in human resources. I now have a better idea of what it is all about and it interests me.
>
> The work experience program really convinced me to go into human resources. It put it over the edge.
>
> I would really like to work full time in this area. I am now more focused. Before the practicum I could not see myself doing some of the things that I did. They taught me so much that I am now quite

keen on learning more.

Human resource management would certainly be my first choice. I really enjoyed what I did during the practicum. However, I can't be picky right now--any office job would be acceptable.

The work experience program really helped to show me the importance of human resource management. However, I would like to work in a small business and human resources is only one component. If I can't find a job with a small business then human resources would be my first choice in a large organization.

It was a lot harder than I expected. It is a very complex area to work in and there is a lot of pressure. I still like it and I will definitely try to find work in a human resource management department.

I never worked in a large office before. This was a new and encouraging environment for me. I had a chance to be creative and the people I worked with were great. The practicum certainly helped me to make up my mind.

However, for some students, the practicum convinced them that human resource management was not a vocation they wished to pursue.

Human resource management is an interesting area and I enjoyed working in the department but I intend on looking for opportunities in other areas. The practicum showed me that human resources is an area that I don't want to get into.

The practicum was great in that it gave me the opportunity to experience an office environment. However, I'd rather be out with people as opposed to sitting behind a desk all day. I'll probably try to find a job in marketing.

Human resource management would get tedious after awhile. A full time job in this area would be boring because it is too regimented. I'm really glad that I took the practicum because I didn't understand the nature of the job.

I took human resource management at NAIT because of the practicum and I wanted to learn more about it. I enjoyed working at it for six weeks but it's too slow of a pace for me. The practicum

confirmed for me that I will not go into human resource management.

Student Summary

In Table 2, a summary of the above student comments and perceptions is presented.

Field Agency Representatives

As was stated in Chapter 3, the field agency representative interviews consisted of two parts. First, they were asked to complete a structured questionnaire (Appendix E) so as to determine their perception on how well the students demonstrated the employability skills as outlined by the Conference Board of Canada, and to comment on whether or not their expectations had been met or exceeded. Second, they were then asked for their comments on the organization and management of the practicum, the perceived benefits and costs as a result of their participation, and the willingness and likelihood of their future participation. Following are the findings from these interviews.

Employability Skills

The field agency representatives' perceptions as to how well the students demonstrated the employability skills are presented in Table 3. A scale from "1--very low" to "5--very high" was used, and in general, the field agency representatives felt that the students demonstrated these skills well above average.

Academic skills. Of the three broad categories of skills, the field agency representatives perceived that the students demonstrated academic skills to a

TABLE 2

Summary of Student Perceptions as a Result of Their Participation in the Work Practicum

ITEM	PERCEPTION
Did the field agency representatives meet the student's expectations?	Yes, in most cases.
Did the students meet their own expectations?	Yes, all students felt they met the expectations they set for themselves.
Did the job description accurately reflect what the student did?	No, most students felt that it did not. However, this was perceived to be positive.
Did the program co-ordinator provide adequate support?	Yes, in most cases.
Did the shortened third semester have any negative impact?	No, most students confirmed that they preferred the 13 week semester. However, faculty could have been better prepared.
Was the six week period over the Christmas season detrimental to the work practicum?	No, most students perceived this time period as favorable.
Did participation in the work pacticum negatively impact on social activities?	No negative perceptions were expressed.
Did the students feel that they should be paid during the practicum?	No, all students felt that they should not be paid.
Did the students perceive that they were well prepared for the practicum?	Yes, however, many did feel that NAIT could better prepare the field agency representatives.
Was their completed course work relevant to the work they performed during the practicum?	Mixed, some courses were considered relevant, others were not.
Did the practicum help the students to become more aware of the importance of personal management skills?	Yes, the importance of creativity, critical thinking and the ability to work under pressure were frequently mentioned.
Did the practicum help make the students aware of the importance of team work?	Mixed, some perceived it did, some felt that time constraints prevented them from coming to a conclusion.
Did the work practicum help to solidify the student's desire to pursue human resource management as a vocation?	Mixed, some stated it did, others stated that it changed their mind.

TABLE 3

Field Agency Representatives' Perceptions as to How Well the Students Demonstrated Employability Skills During Their Practicum

ITEM	FREQUENCY *					N	MEAN	S.D.	RANK
	1	2	3	4	5				
ACADEMIC SKILLS - Those skills which provide the basic foundation to get, keep and progress on a job and to achieve the best results									
Communicate									
• Understand and speak the language in which business is conducted	0	1	6	4	3	14	3.64	0.93	8
• Write effectively in the language in which business is conducted	0	2	5	3	4	14	3.64	1.08	8
• Listen to understand and learn	0	0	3	6	5	14	4.14	0.77	2
• Read, comprehend and use written materials, including graphs, charts and displays	0	0	5	7	2	14	3.79	0.70	6
Average mean for communication skills							3.80		
Think									
• Think critically and act logically to evaluate situations, solve problems, and make decisions	0	1	5	6	2	14	3.64	0.84	8
• Use technology, instruments, tools, and information systems effectively	0	2	3	4	5	14	3.85	1.10	5
• Access and apply specialized knowledge in Human Resource Management	0	2	7	3	2	14	3.35	0.93	10
Average mean for thinking skills							3.61		
Average mean for academic skills							3.72		

* The scale used for these items was as follows: 1 = very low; 2 = low; 3 = average; 4 = high, 5 = very high.

TABLE 3 (cont'd)

ITEM	FREQUENCY • 1	2	3	4	5	N	MEAN	S.D.	RANK
PERSONAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS - The combination of skills, attitudes and behaviours required to get, keep and progress on a job and to achieve the best results									
Positive Attitudes and Behaviours Demonstrate the following:									
• Self-esteem and confidence	0	1	5	4	4	14	3.79	0.97	6
• A positive attitude toward learning, growth, and personal health	0	2	1	4	7	14	4.14	1.10	2
• Initiative, energy, and persistence to get the job done	0	2	1	3	8	14	4.21	1.12	1
Average mean for positive attitudes and behaviours							4.04		
Responsibility									
• The ability to set goals and priorities in work and personal life	0	1	4	6	3	14	3.79	0.89	6
• The ability to plan and manage time, money, and other resources to achieve goals	0	0	5	5	4	14	3.93	0.83	4
• Accountability for actions taken	0	1	4	6	3	14	3.79	0.89	6
Average mean for responsibility							3.84		
Adaptability									
• Demonstrate a positive attitude toward change	0	0	3	5	6	14	4.21	0.80	1
• Recognition of and respect for people's diversity and individual differences	0	0	5	5	4	14	3.93	0.83	4
• The ability to identify and suggest new ideas and to get the job done - creativity	0	1	5	7	1	14	3.57	0.76	9
Average mean for adaptability							3.90		
Average mean for personal management skills							3.93		

• The scale used for these items was as follows: 1 = very low; 2 = low; 3 = average; 4 = high, 5 = very high.

TABLE 3 (cont'd)

ITEM	FREQUENCY 1	2	3	4	5	N	MEAN	S.D.	RANK
TEAMWORK SKILLS - Those skills needed to work with others on a job and to achieve the best results									
Work with Others									
• Understand and contribute to the organization's goals	0	0	5	8	1	14	3.71	0.61	7
• Understand and work within the culture of the group	0	0	5	7	2	14	3.79	0.70	6
• Plan and make decisions with others and support the outcomes	0	1	5	7	1	14	3.57	0.76	9
• Respect the thoughts and opinions of others in the group	0	1	1	8	4	14	4.07	0.83	3
• Exercise "give and take" to achieve group results	0	1	1	8	4	14	4.07	0.83	3
Average mean for teamwork skills							3.84		
Average mean for three categories of skills							3.83		

• The scale used for these items was as follows: 1 = very low; 2 = low; 3 = average; 4 = high, 5 = very high.

lesser extent than the other two. The average mean for the seven skills listed under this category was 3.72. "Accessing and applying specialized knowledge in human resource management" (M = 3.35) was considered to be the least demonstrated skill of all the 21 listed skills. However, it was also perceived that the students did demonstrate a high level of "listening to understand and learn." The mean for this skill was 4.14, the second highest of all the 21 skills.

Personal management skills. It was perceived by the field agency representatives that personal management skills were demonstrated by the students to a higher degree than the other two skill categories. The average mean for this category was 3.93. Demonstrating "initiative, energy, and persistence to get the job done" and "a positive attitude towards change" received the highest means (4.21) of all 21 listed skills. Also, the field agency representatives perceived that "a positive attitude towards learning, growth and personal health" was the second highest demonstrated skill (M = 4.14).

Teamwork skills. According to the field agency representatives, teamwork skills were the second highest demonstrated category of skill. The average mean for this category was 3.84. "Respect for the thoughts and opinions of others in the group" and "exercising give and take to achieve group results" both received the third highest rating (M = 4.07) of all the 21 listed skills.

Expectations

Of the 14 field agency representatives who completed the post-practicum questionnaire, 12 believed that their student placement met their expectations. Six of these individuals stated that their placement exceeded their expectations. The perceived work ethic of the students was the most frequently cited reason for this belief.

> Our student completed assignments as expected. She participated in meetings and showed interest in the work she performed. She followed instructions well and was not afraid to ask questions. All work was completed on time.
>
> Our placement wanted to learn and was not afraid to ask questions or give suggestions. She always kept herself busy.
>
> The project she was assigned was well thought out, neat and organized. It was completed within the required time frame.
>
> During the practicum the student displayed a good learning attitude. He worked with enthusiasm and produced a valid, meaningful report. He worked beyond the assigned hours to accomplish this. He even came in over the Christmas break.
>
> She was willing to "pitch in" and help in all situations. She had a very positive attitude and was willing to work long and hard.
>
> The student assigned to us was very willing to learn and work with others. She worked as hard as any of our permanent staff.
>
> We were very fortunate to receive a student with such a positive attitude and excellent work ethic. She had a willingness to go the extra mile.

Of the two field agency representatives who did not feel that their placement met their expectations, one stated that he would need a longer time period before he could come to this conclusion. The other field agency

representative was assigned the one student who became ill and did not complete the work practicum.

Organization and Management of the Work Practicum

During the in-depth interviews the field agency representatives were requested to share their perceptions of the organization and management of the work practicum. Specifically they were asked to comment on how well NAIT managed the practicum both before and during the time the students were at their establishments. Also, their perceptions on the appropriateness of the six week time period of the Christmas season, and whether or not the students should be paid for this type of experience were requested.

Satisfaction with the organization and management. All the field agency representatives expressed a high level of satisfaction with the organization and management of the practicum. This was illustrated by the following comments:

> There was definitely enough support during the practicum but the pre-practicum organization was what made it successful. The check backs while the student was here was also very good.
>
> The practicum was very well handled. The process started early and as a result things went well. We need a lot of notification to get prepared.
>
> I was confused at first as to what was required but the co-ordinator went out of her way to clear up any confusion. This made it very easy for us.
>
> Administratively it was very good. Lots of lead time was given, everything was what I expected.
>
> I found it was well organized. I took over this position after the initial contact was made and I still received all the information I needed. I particularly enjoyed meeting the student beforehand.

> We were very pleased with the treatment we got from NAIT. The lead time was very adequate. It was very beneficial to have the student come in before he started his practicum because it gave him a chance to become familiar with the company.
>
> There is nothing NAIT could do to make the organization of the practicum any better. We had time to get well prepared.
>
> We were quite comfortable with the way it was organized. We had lots of lead time and that is important.
>
> I believe that the practicum was well organized but this could be more a function of the student and not the administration at NAIT. The student we had was excellent--not all could have been that good.

When asked for recommended improvements most of the field agency representatives did not have any. However, a few suggestions for improvement were offered.

> The mechanics of the practicum were wonderful and I was very satisfied. The only improvement would be to have clearer learning objectives. There was some question as to whether or not what we supplied met the objectives of the program.
>
> Knowing where NAIT focuses the student would help us in the future. Possibly if the student's course outlines were sent to us a couple of weeks before the practicum it would help us focus more on the learning process.
>
> It would be nice beforehand to know what courses the students have taken and some of their content. It would give us a better feel on the expectations we should have.
>
> When you make the initial contact with the company, find out who specifically is going to be the student's supervisor. By doing this you can find out that individual's specific needs.

Appropriateness of the six week time period over the Christmas season.

Only one of the 15 interviewed field agency representatives stated that the six

week period over the Christmas season was not conducive to a good learning experience. However, all others perceived that the successful nature of the practicum was partly due to its length and the time of year it was held. Following are some of the comments that were received attesting to this belief:

> Having the practicum over the Christmas break is the best time of year to have it. We have a number of our staff away during this time so we can spend more time with the student. Also, the length of time is just right.

> There was no problem holding the practicum over the Christmas break and the six week time frame is very good. The student had a good chance to get familiar with the company and still had enough time to do something productive. It should not be expanded because it would be difficult to keep the student busy.

> There is no ideal time to have the practicum--we go with the flow. The six week period over the Christmas break worked well. Overall the six week period gave us the opportunity to give the placement a number of different things to do--classification, grievances, recruitment, compensation, and staff relations.

> The timing over Christmas was very good because of the slower pace here at our organization. It gave us the opportunity to spend more time with the student.

> The length of the program was very appropriate. I wouldn't make it any shorter or longer--it was just right. If it was longer the students would experience information overload, if it was shorter they would not learn anything. Also, having the practicum over Christmas was very positive.

> The six week period worked our very well because our placement had enough time to complete a meaningful project. The time over Christmas is the best time of year for us because its our slow time and we can spend more time with the student.

> If the practicum was any longer I believe the learning curve would have dropped. The six week time frame allowed us to give the student meaningful work and it was easy to keep her motivated. If

> the practicum was any longer I think her motivation would have dropped off.

Student payment. As was previously mentioned, co-operative education usually involves payment by the employer to the student who participated in the practicum. However, when designing this project it was decided that this would not be the practice. When asked if the students should have been paid, only two of the field agency representatives stated that they would have been in favor of it. All others stated that it would not have been conducive to their participation if they had been required to pay their student placements. Two principal reasons were cited for this. First, it was felt by the field agency representatives that the students were there as learners, and as learners they should not be paid. Second, the organizations' ability to pay, as a result of current budgetary constraints, would have made it very difficult for these companies to participate. Following are some of the comments received that alluded to the question of payment.

> I have mixed feelings because she was performing the same duties as those who were getting paid. However, its an educational benefit to the student. We could have paid the student something but the main attraction to the program was that no payment was required. I was able to get it approved quickly because there was no required payment.

> If they do a good job they should be paid but we could not have participated if we were expected to pay her.

> The objective of a work practicum is to enable a student to get experience in a work situation and payment should not drive it. I would not have been able to get authorization from senior management if payment was required.

> We could not have paid the student because at the time we really didn't need anyone. Management would not have approved it.
>
> The collective agreement would not let us pay someone when we are laying off permanent people. Besides, the student was here to learn.
>
> It would be very difficult for NAIT to achieve consistency of payment between so many companies. The students, when interacting with one another would focus on "what are you getting paid" as opposed to "what are you learning." If someone found out they were getting paid less, their motivation to learn would decrease.
>
> With a union environment we cannot pay the student placement. The only way we could would be to put them in a management position. However we no longer have these positions.
>
> We would not have been able to participate. It would have complicated a lot of things such as insurance, health benefits, minimum wages, etc. Internally it would have been too costly.

Benefits and Costs

When asked if the benefits their organization received outweighed the costs of their participation in the practicum, two of the field agency representatives stated that it did not. However, both did state that this type of activity was part of their corporate responsibility and as a result they would be willing to participate again in the future. It was their perception, that by participating, a positive public relations image was promoted.

The other 13 field agency representatives perceived that the costs associated with their participation were very minimal and the quality of the student placements along with the work they did far exceeded these costs. Following are some of the comments received from the field agency representatives expressing this perception.

The student we had was exceptional. She gave a tremendous presentation on her last day, and it was a lesson to us all how we have to become more professional when we do this type of thing.

She caught on so quickly and fitted in so completely that it was like having another employee. I mean that quite sincerely. We always have more work to do than bodies to do it, so she really did help.

She was very productive. We got an excellent report and we are going to take action on it. The work she did was for real, not just to keep her busy.

We received a significant benefit because we had an extra pair of hands to do the work. It also gave us a chance to see what's going on in education.

From a corporate perspective there were benefits. The student did work that someone else would have had to do. Also, the student worked with our staff and our staff was able to experience some reality. We have a tendency to become to narrow in the way we do things and its beneficial to be exposed to someone who has new and different ideas.

It was energizing for us to have someone new in the department. It helped our permanent employees to get a different focus and new ideas.

We definitely received a benefit that far outweighed the costs. We got three policies reviewed. The work she did on the sexual harassment policy was very, very good. Also, our junior staff got a lot out of it. They became more focused as a result of working with her.

We have a very low turnover in this department. The practicum forced us to review our procedures. By having new blood around I had to explain why we did this and why we did that. It gave us a chance to question why we do the things we do.

The student was very capable and we did get a fair amount of work accomplished, she did a lot for us. She brought a new perspective to the way things are analyzed. This helped me to learn as well.

Willingness and Likelihood of Future Participation

The possibility of future participation was raised by the researcher with the fifteen field agency representatives. All 15 stated that they would be willing to participate in a similar practicum in the future. Comments such as "I had a very positive experience and I would be very willing to participate again" and "certainly we would be willing because this organization has a commitment to both the community and to education . . . it is part of how we see our mission", are an accurate reflection of all comments received on this subject.

However, when asked about the likelihood of future participation, two of the field agency representatives stated that it was doubtful. One individual cited an anticipated major restructuring of their organization whereby the Human Resource Management Department was expected to be relocated in Calgary. The other expressed concern that current downsizing coupled with the militant nature of the union could seriously jeopardize his company's future participation.

The other 13 field agency representatives were confident that they would be able to participate next year. The following comment by one of these field agency representatives summarizes this belief.

> The likelihood that this organization would be willing to participate again is 99.9%. We benefited from the experience and we have a responsibility to the community, and in particular to young people still in school.

Field Agency Representative Summary

In Table 4, a summary of the comments and perceptions of the field agency representatives is presented.

Instructors

Although all instructors in the Management Program were consulted before the implementation of the practicum, they were not involved with any pre-practicum interviews or questionnaires. However, 12 weeks after the students had returned from their practicum and one week before they wrote their final exams, those instructors who were involved with teaching the students were requested to share their perceptions on the strengths and weaknesses of the practicum and the desirability of continuing or expanding it to other disciplines within the program. Following are these perceptions.

Strengths and Weaknesses

During the personal in-depth interviews each of the five instructors was asked to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the practicum. Specifically their perceptions on its impact on the learning process, the quality of student, the image presented to the business community, the recruitment of students, and whether or not the benefits outweighed the costs, were sought.

Learning process. When asked if they thought the practicum aided the learning process, all five instructors expressed positive opinions. The two principal reasons cited for this attitude stemmed from the perception that the practicum helped the students to become a little more mature, and that it helped to solidify

TABLE 4

Summary of Perceptions of the Field Agency Representatives as a Result of Their Participation in the Work Practicum

ITEM	PERCEPTION
How well did the students demonstrate the employability skills?	All skills were demonstrated well above average.
Were expectations met or exceeded?	Yes, most field agency representatives felt that their expectations had been met or exceeded.
Was there satisfaction with the organization and management of the work practicum?	Yes, in all cases. However, the field agency representatives did offer a few suggestions.
Was the six week period over Christmas deemed appropriate?	Yes, most field agency representatives thought that this time frame was very conducive to the successful work practicum.
Should students be paid for this type of practicum?	No, most field agency representatives did not think it appropriate.
Did the perceived benefits outweigh the costs?	Yes, most field agency representatives expressed a high degree of satisfaction.
Is there a willingness and likelihood for future participation?	Yes, all field agency representatives are willing. However, two did not think it possible.

what was taught in the classroom. No conflicts between what was being taught and what the student learned during their practicum were perceived.

> They were more mature when they came back. They had been exposed to a work situation and if learning can be defined as learned behaviour, then learning did take place. There was a definite positive change in behaviour and I think this was a result of being exposed to the real way of doing things, given all the politics and complexities of a typical office.
>
> On several occasions students brought up examples on things they had seen or experienced that related to what we were talking about in class. They would not have had those points of reference had they not taken the practicum.
>
> Learning was enhanced because an instructor can only go so far in the classroom. It provided the opportunity to the students to apply some of the theoretical knowledge they received in the classroom. Also, it solidified what we taught in the classroom because it helped the student to understand how relevant the theory was. They could see the linkage between the workplace and the classroom.
>
> I personally did not encounter any problems in the classroom as a result of the practicum. In part, this could have been due to the fact that I taught them courses that were not directly related to human resource management. However, in some generic topics, such as the importance of TQM, it helped confirm what I said in the classroom. The management of the learning process was enhanced because the students were able to confirm for themselves whether or not the material was relevant.
>
> I did get some comments as to what they were exposed to, as opposed to what we were teaching. But, this should not be seen as negative. It's good for the students to be exposed to different ways of doing things. Their attitude towards learning is improved--they now realize how much is to be learned not only at school, but also after they finish school.

Quality of student. When queried as to whether or not they perceived that the overall quality of the students had increased as a result of taking the practicum, the instructors expressed a guarded optimism. They felt that in general

the quality was increased but their responses were not totally positive.

> It depends on the student. It didn't do them any harm, but it would be very difficult for me to say that the quality of the student increased in a significant way. They were only out there for six weeks.

> I don't think the quality decreased. Some students had dramatic improvements, whereas with others, only marginal improvements were demonstrated. I believe that those students who were never previously exposed to an office environment were the ones who experienced the greatest gain.

> The students had an opportunity to see just how important non-academic skills are when working in business. This in itself should improve their marketability to prospective employers but it would be hard for me to say that their quality improved.

Image presented to the business community. It was hoped that by introducing a work practicum into the program an enhanced image would be portrayed to Edmonton's business community. When asked if they perceived this to have occurred, all instructors stated the affirmative. However, this positive attitude was tempered with a warning for the future. That is, the perceived success of any practicum, from the business community's perspective, rests largely with the quality of the student. The students who participated in this pilot project were considered by the instructors as being very good. As a result, they perceived that the Management Program's image was enhanced. According to the instructors, care must be taken in future practica if this positive image is to be maintained. These thoughts were illustrated by the following comments:

> The students who participated this time did us proud. They were a good group. However, whether or not a positive image is presented depends upon who is involved. If we have poor students in the

> practicum its going to present a poor image. As long as the administrators of future practicums are selective and permit only those students who have passed all their first year courses to participate, it will be alright.
>
> In this case our image has been improved. But we have to be careful in the future. If we send out poor students we are going to have problems and this in turn will give us a negative image.
>
> It was a very positive public relations activity this time. Hopefully we will have the same quality of student participating in the future. If they are poor we are going to receive very negative publicity. However, having said this, it's worth the risk.
>
> I was apprehensive in November about some of the students who were scheduled to go out on the practicum after seeing them in class for two months. I really doubted that they would portray a positive image as to the typical management student. However, the ones that I was most concerned about were perceived in a very favorable light by the employers. They presented what we did here at NAIT quite favorably.

Recruitment of students into the program. As was stated in Chapter 1, the Accounting, Finance, Marketing and Management Programs all share a common first year. Upon completing their first year, the students then choose which program they wish to specialize in during their second year. Currently the Management Program has the lowest enrolment and, as a result of incorporating this work practicum into its curriculum, it is the only one with an outside experiential component. When asked if this type of work practicum would help to recruit future students into the program, all instructors perceived that it should. The principal reason for this perception was that the instructors believed the students would be mature enough to understand the importance of being exposed to the business community and they would see this as an aid in securing

employment. Following are some of the comments that reflected this perception:

> It only makes sense that the practicum will encourage students to come into the program. At this time jobs are scarce and our students know how difficult it is to find a job. They also know that a work practicum will give them exposure to the labour market.

> I think it will attract students. It's an attractive proposition for students during these tough economic times. The students get a few weeks of practical experience that they can include on their resumes.

> Yes, the practicum would encourage students to take the program. More and more students are realizing that employers are looking for experience and the students see this as making it easier for them to meet these expectations. They get a chance to get a little experience while still having the security of attending school and it gives them more to talk about when being interviewed.

Benefits vs. costs. Very few problems were perceived by the instructors as a result of incorporating the work practicum into the program's curriculum. There were a few timetabling problems during the midterm and final examinations, and two instructors did feel that they had to work harder so as to coordinate the same course over two different time periods. However, these problems were considered minor and the instructors felt that the benefits to both the students and themselves offset any perceived costs.

> It was worth the extra effort because both the students and myself gained from the experience. It increased the students interest in the courses they were taking and as a result it made it more pleasant for me when teaching them something about my area of expertise.

> I believe there was more in the way of benefits than costs. The practicum students seemed to be more together when they returned. In other classes the students were more fragmented and as a result the courses became more fragmented. The cohesiveness of the courses I taught to the practicum students were enhanced.

> Because of the concentrated time frame I experienced a heavier

> workload. However, I have now been through it once and if we have another practicum next year I will be better prepared. Besides, the benefits that the students receive by participating in the practicum outweigh the extra work--I really don't mind it that much.

Desirability of Continuing and/or Expanding to Other Disciplines

All instructors felt that the practicum should be continued in its present form. However, there was also a consensus that it should not, at this time, be extended to other disciplines within the program.

The perceived success of the practicum in the human resource management stream was cited by all instructors as the main reason why the practicum should be continued. Typical responses included the following:

> I thought it was very positive for the first time through. Feedback was favorable from both the students and employers, and if we can manage it I would like to see it continued.

> It would be a good idea to continue the practicum in human resources next year. For a pilot project it was very successful.

There were two principal reasons cited by the instructors as to why they believed it was not a good idea to expand the practicum. First, it was perceived by the instructors that not all students are mature enough to assimilate in 13 weeks the academic material that is normally taught in 16 weeks. They felt that this increased pressure, along with the rigors of an outside practicum, would be too much for many students to handle.

Second, the teaching of practicum students did not present a problem because there was only one section. Currently at NAIT instructors are required to teach 615 hours per year, normally spread over 32 weeks. This averages out to

approximately 19 hours per week. If all students in the program were enrolled in a practicum, the average weekly teaching load would become 23.5 hours for 26 weeks. This was perceived by the instructors as too heavy a burden. In addition, they believed that extra duties would be assigned to them during the six week period that the students were out on their practicum.

Instructor Summary

In Table 5, a summary of the above instructors' comments and perceptions is presented. For the most part the instructors perceived that the work practicum has a positive impact on the program. However, they did not wish to see the practicum expanded to other disciplines.

TABLE 5

Summary of Instructors' Perceptions as a Result of Their Participation in the Work Practicum

ITEM	PERCEPTION
What was the impact of the practicum on the learning process?	All instructors felt that the practicum aided the learning process.
Was the quality of graduate enhanced as a result of their participation in the practicum?	Possibly, most instructors expressed guarded optimism.
Was the image presented to the business community enhanced?	Yes, because of the perceived high quality of the students who participated.
Would recruitment into the program be increased as a result of having a practicum?	Yes, all instructors believed it would.
Did the benefits exceed the costs?	Yes, very few costs were perceived by the instructors.
Would it be desirable to continue the practicum in the human resource management stream?	Yes, all instructors thought it would be beneficial.
Should the practicum be expanded to other disciplines within the Management Program?	No, all instructors stated that it would not be prudent to do so at this time.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the researcher's conclusions regarding the perceived impact that the practicum had on the Management Program at NAIT. The perceptions of the three stakeholders, and Leavitt and Bohrami's model depicting the interactive nature of an organization's structure, task, people, control, and environment, are used as the framework for this discussion.

In addition, the researcher's reflections on the knowledge base of field practica and conclusions on the specific research questions are addressed.

Perceived Impact of the Work Practicum on Task, People, Control, and Environment

Task: What the Organization Does

As was previously stated, the Management Program's primary task is to prepare people for employment. The students perceived that substantial learning took place in non-academic areas such as creativity, critical thinking, and working under pressure, and this resulted in increased employability. Likewise the field agency representatives perceived that students were given the opportunity to successfully demonstrate all three employability skills--academic, personal management and teamwork, and this positive attitude indicates that the students would be considered better prepared for employment. The instructors also

expressed a degree of optimism with regard to the enhanced employability of the students. In conclusion, the practicum supported the task and did not change it.

People: The Doers of Work

The practicum students and the instructors who were involved with teaching them were considered to be the doers of work. The practicum did affect the instructors in that there were some implications for adjusting the process of their teaching behaviour. The practicum also affected the students in as much as a new range of students behaviours, specifically personal management and teamwork skills, were required in a field context.

In addition, the inter-relationship between the instructors and students was affected in that both groups had a clearer focus on goals to be achieved in the academic program.

Control: The Management of the Learning Process

The practicum wrested some control from the instructors in that the field agency representatives gained some control over the learning process. In addition, the instructors needed to adjust to an imposed new time frame of 13 weeks and their teaching loads were increased for a period of time during each semester.

The students also lost some control over their own learning process. The practicum was not compulsory but the students did not have the opportunity to choose their field agency representative. This resulted in them being subjected to the wills and expectations of another unknown actor.

Environment: Edmonton's Business Community

The practicum had a positive impact on the program environment in that it enhanced the level of business community support for the program by creating positive images of the students and a clearer understanding of program goals.

Summary

Generally the practicum supported the main task of the program, required adjustment of instructor and student behaviour, and produced positive changes in the environment. Some control of the learning process was relinquished by the instructors and students to the field agency representatives.

Knowledge Base of Field Practica

In Chapter 1, it was stated that a "modified" co-operative work experience program or work practicum had to be developed so as to facilitate an experiential learning component into the Management Program. Specifically the industry work component of the pilot project could only be six weeks, which is slightly more than 9% of the students' total academic program. According to the Canadian Association for Co-operative Education (1988), the practicum component of a co-operative education program should be at least 30%. In addition, co-operative education makes provision for the students to be paid during their placement. In this project the students did not receive any payment for their participation. However, it would appear that many of the benefits accrued from a co-operative education program can also be realized by utilizing the same work practicum

format that was used in this study.

Benefits realized. Several authors including Van der Vorm (1987), Everard (1987), Wilson (1987), Brown (1984), Lee (1976), and Gore (1973) stressed the benefits that accrue to students who participate in co-operative education. These benefits include enhanced personal and social development, a more realistic expectation of their chosen vocation, a stronger certainty about their career choice, a clearer understanding of the need for good interpersonal skills, and an enhanced understanding of how their studies relate to practice. The students who participated in this work practicum perceived that they also received these benefits.

Commercial and government agencies can also benefit by participating in co-operative education. Both Maxwell and Currie (1984) and Hamilton (1983) claimed that employers can discharge a public responsibility by their participation. In addition, Drawbaugh (1977) stated that students are eager to learn and are capable of doing meaningful work. These two benefits were frequently mentioned by the field agency representatives as being received as a result of their participation in the pilot project.

Loken and Cutt (1986) concluded that co-operative education contributes to the number of students that are attracted to an institution. In this situation, the instructors who were involved in teaching the practicum students perceived that if the practicum was continued more students would be attracted into the Management Program. In addition, the instructors confirmed that they were able

to make their courses more practical and responsive to the needs of the employers. These benefits were also cited by Loken and Cutt as reasons why co-operative education should be included in the learning process.

The very positive feedback received from the field agency representatives as to how well the students demonstrated the three categories of employability skills confirmed that this practicum helped to familiarize the business community with the students capabilities. This benefit was cited by Heermann (1975) as one of the advantages of utilizing co-operative programs in education.

Resistance overcome. The practicum was also able to address some of the resistance that is normally experienced by practitioners of co-operative education. According to Kitson (1993), co-op students spend up to an additional year in completing their academic program, and do not gain any competitive advantage over other students. This pilot project was designed so that there was no increase in the program's length. Even if some of the participating students did not receive any tangible benefit, they were able to complete their studies within the same time frame as the regular students.

Wooldridge (1987) claimed that the costs of co-operative education are too high in that there is a need to supplement faculty with co-ordinators. In this project a co-ordinator was appointed but she was a full-time instructor, and the practicum was assigned as part of her regular teaching duties. In addition, the practicum replaced one academic course and as a reuslt the additional costs associated with experiential learning was kept to an absolute minimum.

Heermann (1975) stated that it was very difficult to timetable the co-op component in that students should have challenging jobs during times that are convenient to the employers. The timing of the pilot project, over the Christmas season, was very well received by both the students and the field agency representatives. Both stakeholders perceived that they benefitted from this scheduling.

Integration. The pilot project supported the importance of integrating the practicum into the curriculum. Ashworth and Saxton (1992), Miller (1991), Dollar and Rust (1983), and Smithers (1976) all asserted that this was very important. The perceived success of this pilot project can be attributed in part to its integrative nature. The students in particular were very supportive of having the practicum between the third and fourth semester.

Conceptual model (Leavitt and Bahrami). The conceptual model proved to be useful in exploring the implications of the practicum on the program as a whole. For purposes of this study, structure was interpreted as program structure rather than organizational structure, and task was interpreted as program objective rather than as learning activities. This suggests that the model has versatility and potential for application in a range of organizational situations where one element is subject to change.

Summary. Experiential learning components do not have to be held over extended periods of time and students do not have to be paid during their placement. Many of the benefits that are associated with co-operative education

can be realized, and much of the resistance to co-operative education can be overcome by utilizing this pilot project's format.

Specific Research Questions

Based upon the findings from the group focus and personal interviews, the following are the researcher's conclusions regarding the specific research questions.

Participating Students

1. To what extent did the students perceive that their expectations were met by their participation in the work practicum?

The majority of students felt that the field agency representatives met their expectations. They perceived that they were assigned meaningful and challenging work, and were given the necessary guidelines and support when working on these tasks. In addition, all students felt they met their own expectations. They perceived that they met their own learning objectives and at the same time were able to make a contribution to their assigned organization.

2. How did the students perceive the structure, organization and management of the work practicum?

The students expressed a high level of satisfaction with the structure of the practicum and they specifically endorsed its integrative nature. They perceived that the six-week period, over the Christmas break, and between the third and fourth semester was conducive to a beneficial learning experience. In addition, it was perceived by the students, that by not being paid during the practicum, a

more productive learning environment was achieved.

For the most part, the students believed that the coordinator provided the necessary amount of support, and that the practicum was well managed. They also believed that the Management Program had well prepared them for this experiential learning experience.

3. How was the work practicum perceived by students to influence their awareness of and attitude towards their academic studies, personal management skills, and teamwork skills?

Several courses were cited by the students as not being relevant to the human resource management vocation. However, many did realize that the first year Business Administration program had to expose them to generic business courses, because during their first year they had not yet determined which would be their chosen vocation. Also, the students did state that many courses including Communications, Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Management were very pertinent and useful during their practicum.

The students became very aware of the importance of personal management skills. Upon completion of the practicum they stated that it illustrated to them that employers seek potential employees who possess much more than just academic skills. Specifically the importance of creativity, critical thinking, and the ability to work under pressure were cited.

For some students the practicum did not afford them the opportunity to work as part of a team, and as a result, they could not comment on the value of

teamwork. However, many students did work closely with others, as part of a team, and were able to experience the value of teamwork. They confirmed that these skills were extremely important.

4. How was the work practicum perceived by students to influence their awareness of and attitudes towards human resource management as a vocation?

The work practicum did have an influence on the students' chosen vocation. For 13 students it solidified their desire to pursue a career in human resource management. However, the practicum convinced four students that human resource management was not a vocation worth pursuing.

Field Agency Representatives

1. To what extent did the field agency representatives perceive that the participating students demonstrated the employability skills as outlined by the Conference Board of Canada?

The field agency representatives perceived that the students demonstrated all of the employability skills well above average. In addition, of the three general categories of skills, they believed that the students demonstrated the highest level of expertise in personal management. Also, those specific skills that were deemed most important were perceived to have been demonstrated to a higher degree than those considered less important.

2. What were the perceptions of the field agency representatives with respect to the organization and management of the project and how could it be improved?

The organization and management were considered by the field agency representatives to be highly satisfactory and very few suggestions for improvement were offered. Specifically, the amount of lead time that was given to prepare for the placement, and the six-week time period over the Christmas season were deemed very favorable. In addition, it was considered appropriate that the students not be paid for this type of work experience program.

3. What were the perceived benefits received and costs incurred by the field agency representatives as a result of their participation in the project?

For the most part the field agency representatives perceived that the benefits they received far outweighed the costs. They believed that the students did meaningful work and made a positive contribution to their organization. In addition, it was perceived that there were very few and minimal costs.

4. What would be the likelihood that the field agency representatives would be willing to participate in similar work practica in the future?

All 15 field agency representatives stated that they would be willing to take part in a similar practicum in the future. However, two believed that it would be doubtful that their organization could participate. The reasons given for non-participation had nothing to do with their pilot project experiences. One field agency representative cited the relocation of her human resources department to another city, and the other mentioned a possible conflict with his company's union.

Instructors

1. What were the instructors' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the practicum as it related to the total second year Management Program?

The strengths of this practicum, according to the instructors, included the perception that it aided the learning process, and it enhanced the image of the program within the business community. Also, it was perceived that similar practica in the future would help in the recruitment of students. With the exception of a few timetabling and co-ordination problems, no weaknesses were perceived.

2. What were the instructors' perceptions of the desirability of continuing the human resource management work practicum in the future?

According to the instructors, the perceived success of this practicum makes it highly desirable to continue it next year.

3. What were the instructors' perceptions of the desirability and feasibility of expanding the work practicum to other disciplines in the Management Program?

The instructors perceived that it would not be desirable nor feasible to expand the work practicum to other disciplines at this time. Two reasons were given. First, not all students are mature enough to handle a full academic workload in a shorter time period, and then participate in an outside learning experience. Second, if additional work practicum class sections were offered, it would concentrate the instructors workload into an unacceptable time frame.

CHAPTER 7

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

The purpose of this chapter is to present the researcher's recommendations for possible future work practica in the Management Program at NAIT and other postsecondary business programs. In addition, recommendations for future research are suggested.

Management Program at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology

The researcher concludes that this work practicum pilot project was generally considered to be successful by the three stakeholders. As a result, it is recommended that it be continued in the future. Following are his specific recommendations.

1. The structure of the practicum should not be changed. That is, it should be held between the third and fourth semesters during December and January. The length of the practicum should be six weeks and the students should not be paid.

2. The courses offered during the two year program should not be changed. Although some students believed that some courses were not relevant to human resource management it is important to maintain the common first year. Students entering first year do not know which vocation they wish to pursue and it is prudent to expose them to a generic learning experience so that they can make

a more informed choice upon entering their second year.

3. It is important that the co-ordinator be assigned duties as early as possible, preferably by the middle of August. Contact with prospective field agency representatives should begin in early September.

4. For the most part the same process should be utilized. However, the following addition is suggested. Once a field agency representative agrees to participate, this person should be supplied with an outline of the Management Program's calendar description, a listing of the competencies that the student is capable of performing, and the course outline for the Human Resource Management course.

5. The field agency representatives should be given the option as to whether or not they supply a job description. For the most part job descriptions were not utilized during the pilot project and were not perceived to be needed by the students.

6. As with the pilot project, students who are selected to participate in future practica should not have any first year deficiencies. That is, they should have successfully completed their first year of study with no failures.

7. The number of students participating next year should not exceed 25. This represents one class section, and until the instructor workload issue is examined in greater detail, it would be unwise to expand the practicum to more students.

8. Should the opportunity arise, all supervisors in the field practicum process should be prepared to give feedback in the form of corrective criticism. Students perceived that this would enhance the learning experience.

9. Orientation and training of all participants including students, and field and institutional supervisors is recommended in future practicum programs.

10. Whenever possible the matching of expressed student interests and field placements is recommended. However, this should not be viewed as essential.

Implications for Practice at Other Postsecondary Institutions

The perceived success of the pilot project makes this type of work practicum a very attractive alternative for those institutions who are seeking ways to improve their curriculum. The six-week, non-paid practicum appears to offer most of the benefits that are accrued to those programs that offer a full co-operative educational component within their curriculum. However, care should be taken to assure that work load implications for faculty are considered and understood by institute or college managers.

Recommendations for Further Research

There are three recommendations for future research.

1. Pilot studies in other business disciplines at NAIT could be evaluated using the same methods that were used in this study.

2. A follow-up study could be conducted in three to five years to examine the employment outcomes of the participating students, as opposed to those students who took the regular program.

3. Research into the most effective way to evaluate this type of practicum should be conducted in the near future.

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APPENDIX A

Student Pre-Work Practicum Interview Guide

Northern Alberta Institute of Technology

Management Program

Student Pre-Work Practicum Interview Guide

1. Why did you enrol in the work practicum program?

2. A. Did you attend the orientation session?

   B. Did the orientation session give you a clear understanding of the work practicum program?

3. What are your expectations of:

   A. The Employer

   B. Yourself

   C. The Job Placement

   D. Program Co-ordinator

4. What are your opinions/feelings regarding:

   A. The organization of the practicum program

   B. The structure of the practicum program

   C. How well the curriculum has prepared you for the work practicum

5. What changes, if any, would you like to see incorporated into future work practicums?

APPENDIX B

Student Post-Work Practicum Interview Guide

NORTHERN ALBERTA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Student Post-Work Practicum Interview Guide

PART A Debriefing:

1. Where expectations met with regard to:
   a. employer
   b. yourself
   c. job placement
   d. program co-ordinator

2. Has your opinions/feelings changed regarding the following:
   a. organization
   b. structure
   c. preparation

3. Additional changes.

Part B Research Questions:

(Following to be handed out to the students prior to group focus interview)

AWARENESS	-	being conscious and understanding of a situation
ATTITUDE	-	a positive or negative affect toward a particular group, institution, concept, or social situation

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1. Awareness of:
   a. academic skills
   b. personal management
   c. teamwork
   d. career choice

2. Attitude towards:
   a. academic skills
   b. personal management
   c. teamwork
   d. career choice

3. Comments

APPENDIX C

Field Agency Representative Pre-Work Practicum Questionaire

EMPLOYER
HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
PRE-WORK PRACTICUM QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How important are the following skills for students beginning their work practicum? Please use the following scale and circle your choice:

    1. Not at all important
    2. Not so important
    3. Fairly important
    4. Important
    5. Very important

ACADEMIC SKILLS - Those skills which provide the basic foundation to get, keep and progress on a job and to achieve the best results.

Communicate

• Understand and speak the language in which business is conducted	1	2	3	4	5
• Write effectively in the language in which business is conducted	1	2	3	4	5
• Listen to understand and learn	1	2	3	4	5
• Read, comprehend and use written materials, including graphs, charts and displays	1	2	3	4	5

Think

• Think critically and act logically to evaluate situations, solve problems, and make decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
• Use technology, instruments, tools, and information systems effectively	1	2	3	4	5
• Access and apply specialized knowledge in Human Resource Management	1	2	3	4	5

PERSONAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS - The combination of skills, attitudes and behaviours required to get, keep and progress on a job and to achieve the best results.

Positive Attitudes and Behaviours
Demonstrate the following:

•	Self-esteem and confidence	1	2	3	4	5
•	A positive attitude toward learning, growth, and personal health	1	2	3	4	5
•	Initiative, energy, and persistence to get the job done	1	2	3	4	5

Responsibility

•	The ability to set goals and priorities in work and personal life	1	2	3	4	5
•	The ability to plan and manage time, money, and other resources to achieve goals	1	2	3	4	5
•	Accountability for actions taken	1	2	3	4	5

Adaptability

•	Demonstrate a positive attitude toward change	1	2	3	4	5
•	Recognition of and respect for people's diversity and individual differences	1	2	3	4	5
•	The ability to identify and suggest new ideas and to get the job done - creativity	1	2	3	4	5

TEAMWORK SKILLS - Those skills needed to work with others on a job and to achieve the best results

Work with Others

•	Understand and contribute to the organization's goals	1	2	3	4	5
•	Understand and work within the culture of the group	1	2	3	4	5
•	Plan and make decisions with others and support the outcomes	1	2	3	4	5
•	Respect the thoughts and opinions of others in the group	1	2	3	4	5
•	Exercise "give and take" to achieve group results	1	2	3	4	5

2. In your opinion what qualities or attributes could the student demonstrate during the work practicum so as to exceed your expectations?

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS PROFILE: The Critical Skills Required of the Canadian Workforce

Academic Skills

Those skills which provide the basic foundation to get, keep and progress on a job and to achieve the best results

Canadian employers need a person who can:

Communicate
- Understand and speak the languages in which business is conducted
- Listen to understand and learn
- Read, comprehend and use written materials, including graphs, charts and displays
- Write effectively in the languages in which business is conducted

Think
- Think critically and act logically to evaluate situations, solve problems and make decisions
- Understand and solve problems involving mathematics and use the results
- Use technology, instruments, tools and information systems effectively
- Access and apply specialized knowledge from various fields (e.g., skilled trades, technology, physical sciences, arts and social sciences)

Learn
- Continue to learn for life

Personal Management Skills

The combination of skills, attitudes and behaviours required to get, keep and progress on a job and to achieve the best results

Canadian employers need a person who can demonstrate:

Positive Attitudes and Behaviours
- Self-esteem and confidence
- Honesty, integrity and personal ethics
- A positive attitude toward learning, growth and personal health
- Initiative, energy and persistence to get the job done

Responsibility
- The ability to set goals and priorities in work and personal life
- The ability to plan and manage time, money and other resources to achieve goals
- Accountability for actions taken

Adaptability
- A positive attitude toward change
- Recognition of and respect for people's diversity and individual differences
- The ability to identify and suggest new ideas to get the job done – creativity

Teamwork Skills

Those skills needed to work with others on a job and to achieve the best results

Canadian employers need a person who can:

Work with Others
- Understand and contribute to the organization's goals
- Understand and work within the culture of the group
- Plan and make decisions with others and support the outcomes
- Respect the thoughts and opinions of others in the group
- Exercise "give and take" to achieve group results
- Seek a team approach as appropriate
- Lead when appropriate, mobilizing the group for high performance

This document was developed by the Corporate Council on Education, a program of the National Business and Education Centre, The Conference Board of Canada, 255 Smyth Road, Ottawa, Ontario K1H 8M7, Telephone: (613) 526-3280, Facsimile (613) 526 4857

This profile outlines foundation skills for employability. For individuals and for schools, preparing for work or employability is one of several goals, all of which are important for society.

APPENDIX E

Field Agency Representative Post-Work Practicum Questionnaire

EMPLOYER
HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
POST-WORK PRACTICUM QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What level of expertise did the student demonstrate the following skills during his/her work practicum? Please use the following scale and circle your choice:

    1. Very low
    2. Low
    3. Average
    4. High
    5. Very high

ACADEMIC SKILLS - Those skills which provide the basic foundation to get, keep and progress on a job and to achieve the best results.

Communicate

• Understand and speak the language in which business is conducted	1	2	3	4	5
• Write effectively in the language in which business is conducted	1	2	3	4	5
• Listen to understand and learn	1	2	3	4	5
• Read, comprehend and use written materials, including graphs, charts and displays	1	2	3	4	5

Think

• Think critically and act logically to evaluate situations, solve problems, and make decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
• Use technology, instruments, tools, and information systems effectively	1	2	3	4	5
• Access and apply specialized knowledge in Human Resource Management	1	2	3	4	5

PERSONAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS - The combination of skills, attitudes and behaviours required to get, keep and progress on a job and to achieve the best results.

Positive Attitudes and Behaviours
Demonstrate the following:

•	Self-esteem and confidence	1	2	3	4	5
•	A positive attitude toward learning, growth, and personal health	1	2	3	4	5
•	Initiative, energy, and persistence to get the job done	1	2	3	4	5

Responsibility

•	The ability to set goals and priorities in work and personal life	1	2	3	4	5
•	The ability to plan and manage time, money, and other resources to achieve goals	1	2	3	4	5
•	Accountability for actions taken	1	2	3	4	5

Adaptability

•	Demonstrate a positive attitude toward change	1	2	3	4	5
•	Recognition of and respect for people's diversity and individual differences	1	2	3	4	5
•	The ability to identify and suggest new ideas and to get the job done - creativity	1	2	3	4	5

TEAMWORK SKILLS - Those skills needed to work with others on a job and to achieve the best results

Work with Others

•	Understand and contribute to the organization's goals	1	2	3	4	5
•	Understand and work within the culture of the group	1	2	3	4	5
•	Plan and make decisions with others and support the outcomes	1	2	3	4	5
•	Respect the thoughts and opinions of others in the group	1	2	3	4	5
•	Exercise "give and take" to achieve group results	1	2	3	4	5

2. In your opinion did the student meet your expectations during the work practicum? Why or why not?

3. In your opinion did the student exceed your expectations? If so, please explain.

APPENDIX F

Field Agency Representative Interview Guide

NORTHERN ALBERTA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Field Agency Post-Work Practicum Interview Guide

A. Organization and Management of Work Practicum

- satisfaction with organization and management
- recommended improvements

B. Benefits and Costs

- benefits received
- costs and disadvantages

C. Future Participation

- willingness
- likelihood

D. Additional Comments

APPENDIX G

Instructor Interview Guide

NORTHERN ALBERTA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Instructor Post-Work Practicum Interview Guide

A. Strengths and Weaknesses as it relates to the Management Program

- learning process
- quality of graduates
- utilization of facilities
- image presented to business community
- recruitment of students
- benefits v.s. costs

B. Desirability of Continuing

- continue in H.R.M.
- expand to other disciplines

C. Additional Comments

APPENDIX H

Competency Profile - Management Program

MANAGEMENT PROGRAM VALIDATION

COMPETENCY PROFILE DEVELOPMENT (CPD) WORKSHOP RESULTS

Each competency was evaluated and rated, with respect to *Entry Level and Career Advancement*, according to the following criteria:

Extremely Important: 3
Important: 2
Somewhat Important: 1
Not Important/Needed: 0

[a] = Competency added by CPD committee
[b] = Competency re-worded by CPD committee

Oct. 15/91

Upon completing the Management Program, the graduate should be able to: N=18		Below are the response frequencies and means that resulted from the Competency Development Workshop.									
		Entry Level					Career Advancement				
K.	HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	Mean	3	2	1	0	Mean	3	2	1	0
K.1	Formulate a human resource forecast.	.88		3	10	5	2.22	5	12	1	
K.2	Collect/evaluate job information and write job descriptions/specifications.	1.28	1	6	8	3	2.22	6	10	2	
K.3	Attract qualified applicants by employing appropriate recruitment methods.	1.17	2	3	9	4	2.17	6	9	3	
K.4	Screen applicants by using application forms, employment tests and reference checks.	1.50	3	7	4	4	2.28	8	7	3	
K.5	Conduct employment interviews.	1.50	2	7	7	2	2.56	11	6	1	
K.6	Plan, coordinate and conduct orientation, training and developmental programs.	1.22	1	6	7	4	2.28	8	8	1	1
K.7	Coordinate and advise on employee performance evaluation.	1.44	2	7	6	3	2.56	11	6	1	
K.8	Administer pay and employee benefits.	.78		3	8	7	1.39	2	6	7	3
K.9	Conduct job evaluation on various levels of jobs.	1.22	2	4	8	4	2.22	7	8	3	
K.10	Develop a compensation structure.	.83		3	9	6	1.56	4	5	6	3
K.11	Conduct pay surveys and apply results.	.89	1	3	7	7	1.39	2	5	9	2
K.12	Plan and administer health, safety and employee assistance programs.	.72		2	9	7	1.22	2	3	10	3
K.13	Administer collective agreements.	.83	1	4	4	9	1.28	3	5	4	6
K.14	Coordinate and advise on corrective preventative discipline.	1.06	1	4	8	5	2.28	8	7	3	
K.15	Investigate and assist in grievance and dispute settlement.	.83	1	2	8	7	1.72	5	6	4	3
K.16	Negotiate collective agreements.	.56	1	1	5	11	1.28	2	7	3	6
K.17[a]	Understand the legislative requirements of H.R.	1.61	3	7	6	2	2.39	9	7	2	
K.18[a]	Counsel	1.33	1	5	7	2	2.47	8	6	1	
K.19[a]	Understand the development and administration of H.R. policies.	1.21		6	5	3	2.14	5	6	3	

APPENDIX I

Student Evaluation Form

NAIT HUMAN RESOURCE
WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

STUDENT EVALUATION

STUDENT:
EMPLOYER:

SUPERVISOR:
TELEPHONE:
DATE:

JOB DESCRIPTION (briefly describe work experience activities)

QUALITY OF WORK

Evaluate neatness, accuracy,

timeliness and thoroughness of

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Evaluate ability to work with

others focusing on cooperation,

team work, diplomacy, assertive-

ness, social skills.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Evaluate listening, speaking and

writing skills, ability to think

clearly, perceptiveness, asking

questions.

WORK HABITS

Consider punctuality, absences,

rule observance. Evaluate

dependability, attitude, enthusiasm,

initiative.

Student Signature

Supervisor Signature

APPENDIX J

Participating Field Agency Representatives

Company List with Contact Names and Addresses

IPL
Melanie Myers
Box 398
Edmonton, Alberta
(IPL Tower, 10201 Jasper Avenue)
T5J 2J9

University of Alberta Hospital
Marion Briggs
8440-112 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 2B7

Ed Tel
Jim Sanderson/
Faith Kennedy/Doug Alloway
Box 20500
756-44 Capital Boulevard
10044-108 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 2R4

Family and Social Services
Dale Silver/Bob Mitchell
Centre West
10035-108 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 3E1

City of Edmonton
Sandy Osietko/Bob Hoy
Centennial Building
10015-103 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 0H1

Treasury Branch Head Office
Ken Winslow
9925-109 Street, 10th Floor
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 2N6

Bank of Nova Scotia
Anita Matheson
10060 Jasper Avenue,
2nd Floor
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 3R8

CNR
Ken Knox
10004-104 Avenue,
19th Floor
Edmonton, Alberta
T5H 4H3

Canada Post
Barbara Schwartz/Don Lavoy
9828-104 Avenue, 2nd Floor
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 2T0

Sherritt Mines
Vivian King/Brian McClelland
Bag 9
Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta
T8L 2P2

University of Alberta
Personnel Services
Wilma Martin
2-40 Assiniboia Hall
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 2E7

Key to Savings
Adrian Abbott
#200, 10460-176 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5S 1L3

Coast Terrace Inn
Michelle Forestier
4440 Calgary Trail
Edmonton, Alberta
T6H 5C2

ISM
Judy Au
#600, 10060 Jasper Avenue
Scotia Place Tower
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 3R8

Weyerhaeuser
Terry Jewel
11553-154 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5M 3N7

Atmospheric Environment Services
Gilles Bechard
Twin Atria Building
4999-98 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T6B 2X3

Nova
Pat Sproat
P.O. Box 2330
Station Main
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 2R1

Holt Renfrew
Maurine Maurier
10180-101 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 3S4

APPENDIX K

Letter Thanking Field Agency Representative for Program Involvement

July 6, 1993

1~

Dear 2~:

Thanks 3~ for your positive response to our Human Resources Work Experience Program. I have enclosed some information about the program.

The involved students are on a special 13 week semester program instead of the regular 16 weeks in order to participate. Their work with you will be full-time, 3 weeks before and 3 weeks after Christmas (exact dates are indicated on the enclosure). The work duties and training you provide should be at the personnel assistant level or higher. These duties might include

- application screening
- reference checks
- entry level interviewing
- assistance with classification updates, and position descriptions

as well as others you identify. Please send us a tentative list of job duties you feel the student will be involved with during their six week work period with you.

As you know, NAIT's Business students focus on the practical application of various business skills. Their involvement in your personnel department will reinforce NAIT's philosophy of providing training to industry standards.

If you have any questions, please call me at 471-7863.

Sincerely,

Co-ordinator
Work Experience Program

:kl

APPENDIX L

Letter Indicating that Student Would be Contacting Employer

October 28, 1993

1~

Dear 2~,

By now, your work experience student has been given your name and telephone number and will be contacting you shortly.

Please note: Their 6 week placement with you will be from **December** 6 to **December** 24 and **January** 3 to **January** 21. I will be calling you in the near future to arrange a convenient time to meet and discuss assessment of the student's work during their placement with you.

To assist us with future planning for the Work Experience Program, would you please fill out the enclosed form and return it in the envelope provided.

If you have any questions, please call me at 471-7863.

Yours truly,

Co-ordinator
Work Experience Program

:kc
Enclosure

APPENDIX M

Student Practicum Agreement

PRACTICUM AGREEMENT

BETWEEN:

The Board of Governors of the
Northern Alberta Institute of Technology
("NAIT")

- and -

_____
(the "Agency")

WHEREAS:

a) NAIT offers a program of study called _____ (the "Program"), in which it desires that Students registered in the Program (the "Students"), receive work experience relevant to the Program;

b) the Agency wishes to participate in such work experience;

NOW THEREFORE THE PARTIES HERETO AGREE AS FOLLOWS:

1. The Agency will aid in preparing evaluation/assessment reports of Students assigned to the Agency as may be required by NAIT and will allow a NAIT representative to meet with the Students during working hours on the premises of the Agency, or otherwise.
2. The Students shall not be employees of the Agency and the Agency shall not be financially responsible in any manner to the Students. The Agency shall not be obligated to provide any salary, medical benefits or other compensation whatsoever to the Students.
3. During the hours the Students are engaged in the work experience, the Students will be governed by the policies of the Agency with respect to all aspects of their behaviour.
4. The Agency may request the removal of any Student from its supervision by written notice to NAIT of such request.
5. The Agency will report all Student absences from the work experience portion of the Program to the Program Supervisor at NAIT.
6. The Agency will use its best efforts to provide the Students with exposure to as many areas of the Program as possible. The Agency will not require a Student to perform any task unless such task might reasonably be expected to be within the scope of the Student's training and abilities.

NAIT WILL:

7. (a) indemnify the Agency against all costs, losses or expenses arising out of all damage to equipment caused by the negligence of any Student during a Student's participation in the work experience.
   (b) indemnify and hold harmless the Agency, it's employees and agents from any and all claims, demands, actions and costs whatsoever that may arise out of the negligent acts or omissions of NAIT, NAIT's employees, agents, and Students in the performance of the Agreement, unless such negligent acts or omissions are at the direction of or occasioned by the Agency, its employees or agents; and
   (c) be responsible for maintaining General Liability insurance, inclusive of malpractice coverage if applicable, to cover NAIT, NAIT's employees, agents, and Students during their performance of this Agreement.
8. For the purpose of the work experience, current Alberta Regulations as amended from time to time, shall apply to the relationship between the Students, NAIT and the Agency for the purpose of coverage under the Workers' Compensation Act.
9. The number of Students and the dates of the training period will be mutually agreed in writing by NAIT and the Agency prior to commencement of the work experience.
10. The terms of this Agreement may be amended by correspondence between the parties. If applicable, further particulars of the work experience shall be identified in a Schedule "A" to be attached to and forming part of the Agreement, to be initialled by NAIT and the Agency.
11. This Agreement shall extend from _____, 19___ to _____, 19___ or until such time as either party gives the other party notice in writing of its intention to terminate the Agreement, provided that such notice shall not take effect until any Students who have commenced the work experience, prior to receipt of such notice, have completed the work experience.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF THE PARTIES HERETO HAVE ACCEPTED THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF THIS AGREEMENT AS OF THE ____ DAY OF _____ 19____.

THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF
THE NORTHERN ALBERTA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Authorizing Signature: _____

Printed Name and Title of Authorizing Signature: _____

Address: 11762 - 106 Street, EDMONTON, AB T5G 2R1

AGENCY: _____

Authorizing Signature: _____

Printed Name and Title of Authorizing Signature: _____

Agency's Address: _____

11EX0134
Revised Dec/98

APPENDIX N

Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

1. _____, a student in the Business Program at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology in Edmonton, Alberta agree to hold in confidence any information pertaining to _____, its staff or clientele which comes to my knowledge during my work experience placement.

Dated _____, 19___ at the City of Edmonton, Alberta

_____ Witness

_____ Student